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# PRIVATE EYE

# BORIS SOUVENIR ISSUE

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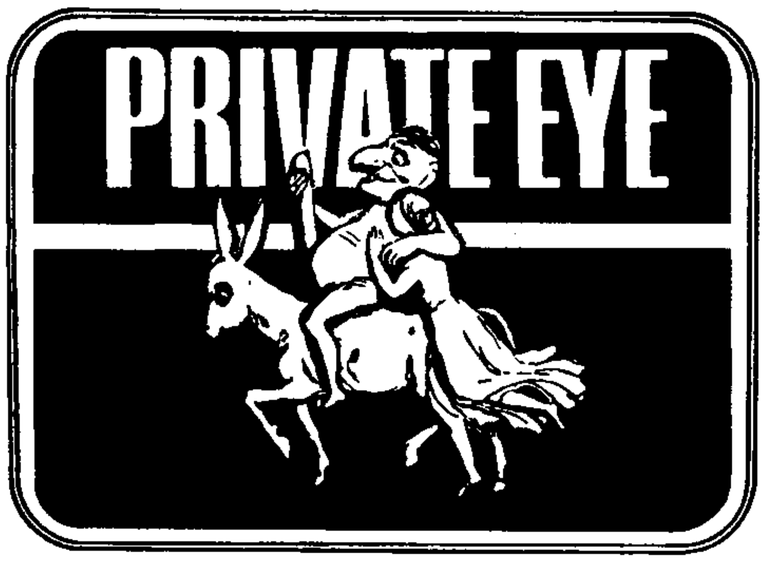



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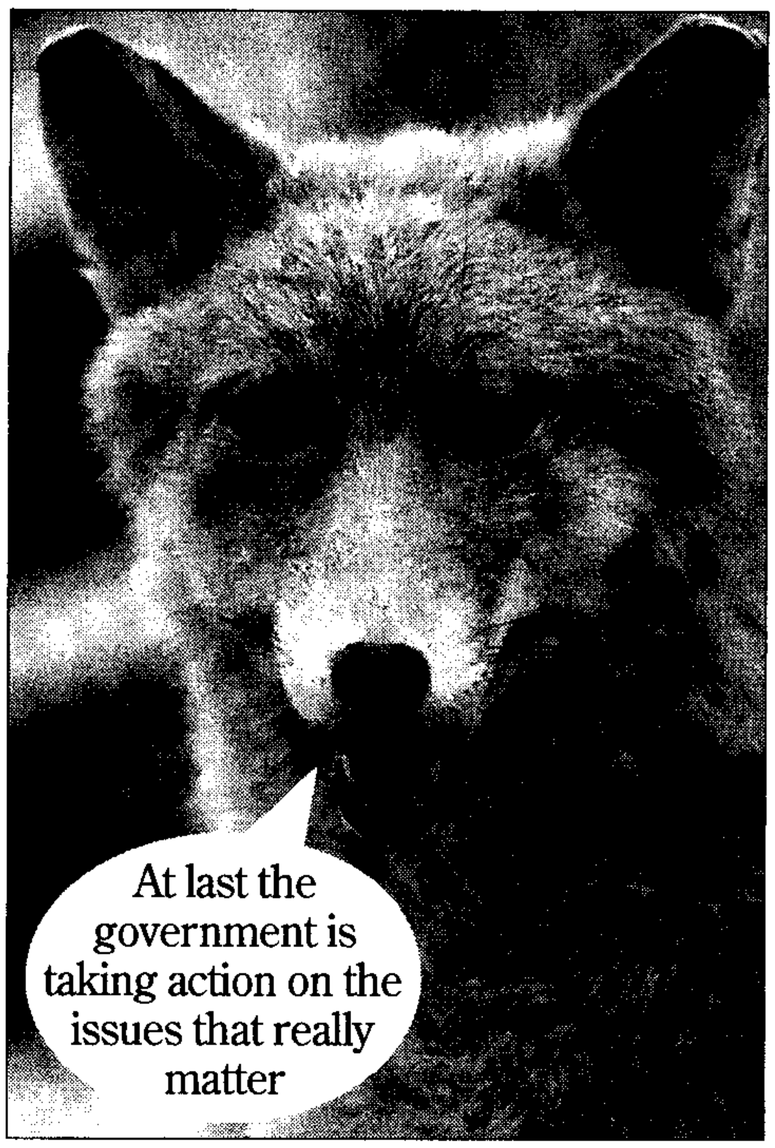
# GLOBAL CRISIS




## Number crunchings

**700** ■ Parliamentary hours devoted to decision to implement hunting ban

**7** ■ Parliamentary hours devoted to decision to go to war against Iraq

**BARELY a week goes by without the revelation of another EDS cock-up on a government contract.**

**Last week it emerged before parliament's work and pensions committee that the EDS computer system at the Child Support Agency (CSA) was unable to perform the most basic functions, with disastrous consequences for thousands of single parents.**

**The CSA was said to be withholding £1m a month from EDS because of the problem. But neither this nor any other EDS-government fiasco has dimmed the company's ambitions to win public contracts.**

The last *Eye* reported the firm's recent deal to run the armed services' payroll, and it is now clear that EDS has its sights on a contract that will affect everyone: home secretary David Blunkett's identity card scheme.

Timed to coincide with Blunkett's response to a recent parliamentary committee's highly sceptical report on the plans, EDS released the results of a survey it had conducted in the US in alliance with the spookily-named "International Association of Privacy Professionals". The survey revealed that "69 percent of consumers are open to the idea of using biometrics for identity management".

Whether the 69 percent understood what this meant is not clear; but the result enabled EDS director Paul Martin to claim that "the findings reinforce our belief that, implemented correctly, ID cards actually enhance citizens' privacy", before confidently predicting that "equivalent UK research will reach broadly equivalent conclusions".

EDS is the largest producer of smart cards in the US and can obviously see the potential in British ID cards, so is doing all it can to get on the right side of the home office. Despite its financial problems, last year the company found the money to sponsor the department's conference on the role of research in policing.

One of the main concerns of campaigners against ID cards is that cock-ups could easily lead to personal information ending up in the wrong hands. If EDS really is the front-runner for administering the scheme, its track record in Britain could be playing into the scheme's opponents' hands.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ABC


**VENDING machines stuffed with crisps and chocolates are a common sight in school dining halls these days. But when governors at one Nottinghamshire school decided to get rid of them to encourage healthy eating, they found they were locked into keeping the machines... by their private finance initiative deal.**

Harry Carlton School, in the village of East Leake, was taken over by Alfred McAlpine Business Services in a new-build PFI deal last year. In a letter to parents, chair of governors Marion Shaw explained that "the presence of the machines is not the fault of the current management who are vehemently opposed to them."

She said the school has a contract with snack-giant Nestle, under McAlpine's management of the catering facilities, and that the machines make a significant profit – none of which goes to the school. "In fact, the school pays for the electricity that powers the machines, with no return," she added. The governors have been told by McAlpine that breaking the contract on the machines would cost the school a "considerable" sum.

**IN ALL the kerfuffle over French arms company Thales renting the two Cheriegate flats in Bristol, some far more significant conflicts of interest involving the firm have been overlooked.**

The vice-chairman of Thales UK, holder of £5bn worth of UK government contacts, is John Howe, formerly deputy chief of the ministry of defence's defence procurement agency (*Eye* 1112).

Howe went to work for Thales (then called Thomson CSF) in 2000, on a two-year secondment from the MoD which was intended to "improve understanding and co-operation between the public and private sectors". When the secondment ended in 2002, however, Howe didn't take his new knowledge back to the civil service. He retired from the MoD and joined the board of Thales.

Meanwhile American businessman Ronald R. Fogelman sits on the board of a Thales joint venture with cruise missile manufacturer Raytheon *and* sits on George Bush's US defence policy board (see *Eye* 1078). You can't buy that kind of influence with a flat rental deal...

## JUST FANCY THAT!

**CROSBY HOMES has donated £4,000 to "new" Labour via the party's Manchester branch.**

Coincidentally, the company is currently trying to buy the playing fields of Altrincham Boys' grammar school which it wants to cover with luxury houses – a scheme rejected by Trafford councillors but now with deputy prime minister John Prescott for appeal.

**NINE** years ago *Observer* hack John Sweeney paid a brief, unauthorised visit to the isle of Brecqhou, home of the secretive Barclay twins who now own the *Telegraph* group. "An island hideaway; construction on a vast scale; tight-lipped locals: this is the stuff of a James Bond movie," he reported.

The impression is amply confirmed by the recent experience of an Englishman on a sailing holiday in the Channel Islands. Though he was well over a mile from Brecqhou, sailing in British waters, a speedboat suddenly bore down on him. It had three of the Barclays' minders on board, all brandishing guns, who ordered him in no uncertain terms to scarper or else.

Is their no limit to the Barclays' paranoia? Apparently not. When a hack heard the story and called them for a comment, son-and-heir Aidan Barclay swiftly dispatched a letter threatening legal action. To report that the Barclays had a fortress on Brecqhou, he claimed, would be a scandalous breach of the family's right to privacy and might well endanger their physical safety.

This seems unlikely, given that the Brecqhou hideaway has already been mentioned in hundreds of articles about the twins. But the bonkers Barclays do not operate by normal standards of reason and logic. As the *Eye* has reported, Aidan Barclay also threatened legal action against the *Evening Standard* a few months ago merely because it noted that he owned a house in London. Although it didn't say where in London (St James's, in fact), Barclay claimed that even this vague reference might place him at risk of terrorist attack.

Nurse! The screens!

*"He's going through a rebellious phase"*

● ***"Everyone should get a Private Eye annual."*** – Elton John and David Furnish's Shopping Do's and Don'ts in *Time Out*

# Street Of Shame

**THE killing of three Black Watch soldiers earlier this month was front-page news. And when the Ministry of Defence released their names – Scott McArdle, Paul Lowe and Stuart Gray – there were dozens of follow-up stories, photos and interviews with grieving friends and families.**

Another Black Watch private was killed by a roadside bomb a few days later, and the initial headlines were similarly huge. But after the MoD released his name, Fleet Street almost entirely lost interest. Several MoD press officers who were put on special late duty that evening to field the expected barrage of calls ended up knocking off early.

Could this be because the soldier rejoiced in the name of Tukes Tukatukawaqa, and was a Fijian rather than a sandy-haired Jock? Surely not.

**WHEN Osama bin Laden issued his latest video, four days before the US presidential election, reaction was sought from one of the few hacks who has actually met him, the *Indie*'s Robert Fisk.**

"This is clearly Osama bin Laden coming back into the picture," Fisk told the right-on American radio show *Democracy Now!* "You have to realise that he is, and this is a fact I can promise you, he keeps up with television news reports, writing, and so on. So he knows what is being said."

Indeed he does. In the full transcript of his message, only part of which was originally broadcast by Al-Jazeera, bin Laden says that for years before 9/11 he had warned that America would get its comeuppance if it took an "aggressive" attitude to him. "You can read it in my interview with Abdul Bari Atwan, as well as my interviews with Robert Fisk. The latter is one of your compatriots and co-religionists and I consider him to be neutral. So are the pretenders of freedom at the White House and the channels controlled by them able to run an interview with him? So that he may relay to the American people what he has understood from us to be the reasons for our fight against you? If you were to avoid these reasons, you will have taken the correct path that will lead America to the security that it was in before 11 September."

If only Dubya were to heed Fisk, it seems, bin Laden would leave America alone. How surprising that the *Indie* hasn't used this handsome tribute to one of its hacks as the basis for a new advertising campaign. ("Read Robert Fisk. Osama does. Do you?") Indeed, more than three weeks after the video appeared, the paper still hasn't mentioned bin Laden's comments at all.

**RICHARD Desmond was unrepentant about his decision to install premium-rate phonelines in the new *Daily Express* offices, telling those who objected to paying double the normal rate to try to give the paper a story or buy advertising space that "many other leading businesses use a national rate number at 10p per minute, such as banks, telephone operators and mobile phone companies".**

Though Desmond may think an 0871- number is final proof of his ascent from pornographer to "leading business", several careless diallers have found themselves forcibly reminded of just how the publisher made his millions.

Several callers who have misdialled the Express switchboard (0871 434 1010) by just one digit have found themselves connected instead to a young lady offering over-18s the choice of "exciting chat with a fantastic girl" or a selection of "really erotic stories".

**NEW *Spectator* chief executive Andrew "Brillo Pad" Neill took to the airwaves last week to warn editor Boris Johnson to adopt a lower public profile. "We are now looking forward to a period of quiet," he told the *Today* programme. "I think the more time the editor spends in Doughty Street editing the magazine and the less we see of him in the newspapers then the better for the editor and the better for the magazine."**

Presumably this can't be the same Brillo Pad who, as editor of the *Sunday Times*, was forever appearing in other newspsapers and on television. For in his memoirs, *Full Disclosure*, Neill strenuously defended his own high profile. "I was firing on all cylinders and my multi-media existence gave my editorship a new lease of life," he boasted.

His boss was less impressed. "Editors should be anonymous," Rupert Murdoch warned Neill. "Your profile is too high and it's generated too many enemies." Brillo thought this a "ridiculous" attitude. "I could not believe my public profile was a problem for him." He suspected it was pure jealousy: the Dirty Digger "doesn't like being upstaged".

Now that Boris Johnson's public profile is a problem for Neill, how long can he survive as editor? By happy coincidence, Neill's friend and TV sparring-partner Michael Portillo is retiring from parliament next year. It will be no surprise if Boris is then eased out, leaving the *Spectator* in the hands of the dream team of Brillo 'n' Portillo. But Portillo himself isn't exactly publicity-shy. Will he be willing or able to keep a low enough profile to avoid upstaging Andrew Neill?

***GUARDIAN* diarist Marina Hyde was quick to deride Andrew Neill's advice that Boris Johnson should keep a low profile after revelations about his personal relationships.**

"It is possible, certainly, to think of ex-editors from whom one would be less willing to take orders to pipe down. But we all benefit from a little self-parody…"

Marina is well qualified to discuss ego-crazed ex-editors and their personal relationships. But since both she and her friend Piers Moron are actually married to other people, it might be best if she keeps a "low profile" too.

**RUMOURS abound that the *Observer* is going to close down its fiendishly expensive Food, Sport and Music monthlies. And they are unlikely to be quelled by the super-duper calendar published by *Observer Food Monthly* last weekend, trumpeting its own brilliance and giving a recipe for each month of 2005.**

Among the special dates marked on the calendar is 16 January: "The *Observer Food Monthly*, free with the *Observer* today." The same rubric appears likewise on 13 February and 13 March. For the rest of the year, however, it is mysteriously absent…

*"The London Olympic HQ? Left at the closed tube station and opposite the broken down bus"*

*"That Paul Burrell makes me want to throw up"*

**THE tabloids and celebrity mags are still reeling at the separation of Kerry McFadden from the last series *I'm A Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!* and the fat one out of Westlife (who is not only no longer fat, but now spells his name differently to prove he is a serious songwriter).**

Last week's *Ok!* featured Kerry explaining how "Brian broke my heart", while in *heat* Brian revealed "the real reason we split." One or other of the pair also graced the covers of *Closer*, *Reveal* and *new!*

Perhaps the "stars' pals" who recently informed the *Mirror* that "they believe the couple will soon return to each other's arms" should urge them to concentrate on the things they still have in common – their two children, but more importantly, their mutual representative, Max Clifford, who is currently picking up around 20 percent from both sides of the lucrative marital spat. Otherwise we may be about to see the first divorce case where the main issue is who gets custody of the PR man.

**WITH sales down by 60,000 last month and morale low at the once soaraway *Sun*, a weekend away in Alicante was clearly the only way for Rebekah Wade and her top lieutenants to escape from their woes and "brain storm" some ideas as to how they might get some readers back.**

It was, therefore, somewhat dispiriting for the merry band to pull up outside their hotel in the pouring rain and discover that the local bar, where they would all soon be drinking, went by the name of The Last Chance Saloon.

**"SOMEONE please shut Bono up", demanded Rod Liddle in the *Sunday Times* last week. "Whenever politicians feel tempted to take pop stars seriously, they should repeat to themselves these words, reportedly said by the singer Mariah Carey: 'whenever I watch TV and see those poor starving kids all over the world, I can't help but cry. I mean, I'd love to be skinny like that, but not with all those flies and death and stuff.' I really didn't make that up."**

Liddle might not have made it up – but an American spoof website called Cupcake did. The quote, which rapidly became infamous, was revealed as a fake by a number of newspapers as long ago as July 1996 – something even the most basic internet search would have revealed.

**THE *Eye* wishes to apologise for apparently understating the drink and drug problems at Leyhill open prison (1119).**

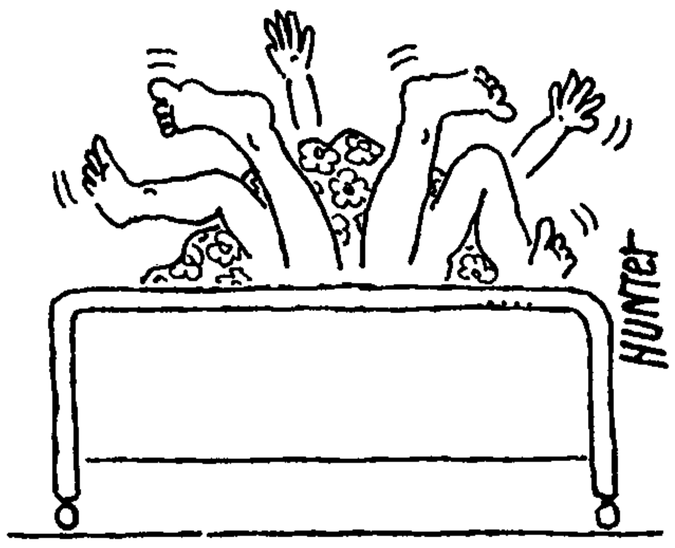
Her Majesty's guests at the Gloucestershire jail have written to tell us that the unit is awash with everything from crack to cannabis. However, the drug of choice remains heroin. It clears the system in only three days and inmates are thus less likely to be caught out by the jail's regular drug-testing programme.

Apparently they shun cannabis because it stays in the system for 28 days and is more likely to be detected.

When they aren't out of their heads on drugs, many knock back the drink. A recent run on vodka in the local shop meant it ran out, with inmates being told to come back later in the week.

There's not much nightlife, but **Jeremy Skidmore** is thrilled by the slopes at France's new ski region

*Sunday Telegraph*




# SPECTATOR SPORT

**13 January 2001**: Having fired Petronella Wyatt as his deputy a year previously, *Spectator* editor Boris Johnson finally makes good on his promise that "she will continue to be an honoured and valued honcho with a title of some grandeur which is still being thrashed out." Yes, he has hired his mistress to write a weekly column about, er, being single. Petsy puts out an appeal to readers: "As the New Year is upon us a young woman's thoughts turn to dust, or rather lust. I am up to my elbows in old parchment concerning the sex life of the man whose life I am writing. This is the 18th century radical John Wilkes. According to my research, Wilkes was the greatest lover this country ever produced, in terms of numbers – an English Casanova... Who is the greatest lover in England today? Would readers please write to me at the *Spectator* with their nominees?"

**4 August**: The *Spectator* is waxing apocalyptic as Jane Shilling declares that this is "the age of decadence… incest, adultery, public copulation for the purposes of entertainment… symptoms of some widespread and horrible social malaise." She's talking about *EastEnders* and *Big Brother*, of course. That sort of thing would never happen in Doughty Street.

**24 September**: "Until the last century women have had to lie to attain anything," muses Petsy, who has recently been complaining of financial problems. "Barred from careers that would enable them to rake in the chips like a croupier, they were instead forced to lie to some man, who, believing the flattery, would provide a decent roof over their heads. Many of the great courtesans, such as Madame de Pompadour, had a genuine interest in politics. But the only way they might fulfil this passion was to pretend to some unattractive but important person that they wanted to go to bed with them."

**13 October**: The tale of a tyrannical and ambitious politician who had a torrid affair with a girl called Petronella emerges – yes, Ms Wyatt has discovered that her namesake may have bedded a young Adolf Hitler. "You can see it, can't you… An attractive, sexually frustrated woman and her young and eager lodger," muses the columnist. "I tell you, we Petronellas get everywhere."

**16 November**: Petsy, fresh from an audience with Iain Duncan Smith, awards him IDS "seven out of ten for sex appeal… Funny thing this sex appeal and politicians business. In the past, the less sex appeal the man had the more successful the statesman… But these days, as Raymond Chandler might have written, there's got to be sex in it somewhere." By a curious coincidence, Boris Johnson is just getting settled into his new job as MP for Henley-on-Thames!

**8 December**: Boris prints the pseudonymous testimony of a wife who has discovered her husband committing "virtual adultery" on the internet. "In these times of state-approved feminism I have argued in defence of men, and now I feel a fool," she writes. "There isn't anything too bad you can say about them… He might well have wrecked a marriage at a point in his life where he could probably use someone around the house. I can't for a moment believe that it was worth it."

**23 February 2002**: "A friend of mine was reading *Anna Karenina* recently and remarked that it was one of the great books on adultery as committed by a respectable female," confides Petsy. "There are countless examples of respectably married men committing adultery in British literature, but none of women. Why this omission?"

**19 October**: Edwina Currie has revealed that she had an affair with John Major while they were both married. Boris Johnson (who is having an affair with Petronella Wyatt) hires Rod Liddle (who is having an affair with Alicia Monckton) to point out that "if she'd tried the same stuff in, say, Sudan, they'd have her killed." Whether *Spectator* publisher Kimberly Fortier (who is having an affair with David Blunkett) approves of the piece is not known.

**11 January 2003**: Petronella muses on the death of family friend Roy Jenkins. "A few writers have brought up the old matter of 'the permissive society'. They say that his 1967 Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act produced abortion on demand… Abortion, whilst it is difficult to cheer for, it has undoubtedly saved many young women from even more miserable lives as well as bringing into this world children who would have grown up uncared for and dysfunctional."

**13 September**: Philip Delves Broughton approves of the French custom of staying silent on their politicians' habit of fathering babies by women other than their wives. "Being discreet, French and worldly about adultery – unlike the sweaty-palmed Anglo-Saxons – they have kept it to themselves." The case of Bill Clinton, however, was quite different, because "his reaction was to lie about it."

**17 April 2004**: Petronella is shocked to learn that singer Robbie Williams may be gay. "It's no wonder, then, that he has had a series of brief, failed relationships with women… As Oscar Wilde said, 'You cannot keep a secret from your own wife. She invariably finds it out'."

**24 April**: Just one week later, Petsy is back on the subject. "The Posh and Becks story makes a disgusting spectacle. Not because of the so-called wronged wife, but because of the behaviour of all the participants. Usually, someone comes out of a sexual imbroglio looking relatively shining. But in this instance, all and sundry are covered in mud, particularly Mrs Beckham. Whatever became of dignity, discretion, and keeping your glossy head down when your famous husband strays?"

**22 September**: In a *Spectator* editorial, Boris notes the "news that the Turkish government is to outlaw adultery, which will be punishable by up to three years in jail. We would of course oppose such a law were it to be proposed in Britain, on the grounds that it is not the state's role to go nosing into the bedroom. But if it is Turkey's wish to reinforce family life with such a law, it is none of the business of northern European liberals. After all, which is the real threat to Christendom: a law which seeks to enforce the sixth commandment or the lax social rules which prevail in dope-smoking, tart-fondling Amsterdam?"

**30 October**: Simon Heffer is tub-thumping on the topic of "the insidious new taboos that govern society and how those who break them risk their careers and credibility… Even after the philosophical ravages of the Swinging Sixties, there would have been no shortage of people in the political class who believed… that single parenthood was undesirable, and that within a marriage it was the man's place to protect the woman," he laments. "Principles that were strongly held on the basis of nearly two millennia of biblical teachings are now branded as 'prejudices' for the simple reason that they do not coincide with the self-indulgent way in which some modern people choose to live their lives."

**13 November**: Petsy is back on the case of married women, castigating an entirely hypothetical housewife. "As she probably cannot afford a nanny, her children are either entrusted to sex-crazed Romanian au pairs who know nothing about looking after infants – causing arguments, stress and despair – or the mother takes care of them full-time. Both ways, the woman becomes bad-tempered, frustrated and shrewish. Because she does nothing to stimulate her mind, she becomes a bore in conversation and, frustrated, a nag to her partner. A friend of mine told me that his marriage began to fall apart when his wife gave up her career and became a housewife. They no longer had anything to talk about and her temper turned vile. Then their sex life vanished." Who could she be referring to?

**20 November**: Alas! The truth is out, Boris has been sacked from the front bench, and as usual, *Spectator* regular Paul Johnson – who for 12 years was regularly spanked behind wife's back by mistress Gloria Stewart – has got hold of entirely the wrong end of the stick. "Why are intellectuals so impotent today?" he thunders. At Doughty Street at least, this does not appear to be the case.

---

**THE *Sunday Telegraph* had an astonishing front-page scoop on 31 October. "Tony Blair has ordered his closest aides to draw up plans for a snap general election to be held in February," political editor Patrick Hennessy revealed. Since all parties had assumed the election would be on 5 May, Hennessy admitted that his revelation "will cause surprise at Westminster".**

Not so much surprise as incredulous laughter. Everyone knows Labour won't go to the country until it's had the chance to deliver a giveaway budget in March. The story was duly denied by Alan Milburn within hours.

Yet the selfsame non-scoop – almost verbatim – had appeared in the *Sunday Times* that day, under the byline of deputy political editor Andrew Porter. Fearful that his piece would be dismissed as an absurd flyer (which it was), Hennessy decided to increase the story's credibility by "laying it off" to Porter as well. The two men were seen plotting the stunt, over several glasses of wine, in the press gallery restaurant on the previous Wednesday.

Now the blundering duo – known to colleagues as "the Laurel and Hardy of the press gallery" – have done it again. On 14 November Hennessy reported in the *Sunday Telegraph* that "George Bush is to visit Britain in February, thrusting his controversial relationship with Tony Blair into the spotlight in the run-up to next year's general election". In the *Sunday Times* that morning, Porter also revealed that "George W. Bush is to visit Britain next February as Tony Blair prepares to fight for a historic third election victory."

So far so good. But what's this? According to Patrick Hennessy, Bush's visit "will pose a problem for the leaders of both main parties as they gear up for a poll expected to be held in or before May". Andrew Porter, too, felt obliged to point out that "Blair is likely to encounter a mixed reaction to a presidential visit so close to an election, which is likely to be held next May."

What happened to the February election which Stan and Ollie had announced with such confidence only two weeks earlier?

*"It's behind you! So let's move on!"*

**HOW ironic that chancellor Gordon Brown should accuse Britain's European Union partners of employing anti-competitive practices to prevent British firms securing lucrative European public contracts.**

In fact it is the rest of the EU that is about to force Brown to stop one of the most anti-competitive practices he has allowed to flourish at huge costs to taxpayers. This is the practice of selecting a "preferred bidder" when offering lucrative private finance initiative (PFI) contracts to build schools, hospitals, prisons, roads and the underground network.

The government seeks outline bids with no detailed specifications for most PFI or PPP (public, private partnership) projects and then chooses its "preferred bidder". It is only then that a detailed contract is worked out. But with a "preferred bidder" identified, most of the other contractors decide it's not worth wasting any more money and drop out. The "preferred bidder" can then effectively hold a gun to the government's head – reducing services, finding hidden costs and risks, etc – so that by the time the contract is finalised, the cost is often considerably higher than first envisaged.

As the EU recognised some time ago, this was because there was no longer any effective competition at the crucial stage of contract negotiation. Thanks to an EU directive which will come into force next year, the practice of appointing a preferred bidder will be outlawed as anti-competitive. And that will save the taxpayer many, many millions as the litany of disastrous PFI ventures from the London underground to IT projects and hospitals too numerous to mention, illustrates.

One might expect Brown to favour the change, but his business chums don't like it. They don't want to "waste" millions of pounds drawing up detailed bids for huge projects that they may not secure. If they have to, PFI might not look so inviting. It was thus no surprise that Brown hired Alan Wood, chief executive of Siemens (of passport agency IT disaster fame) to review procurement practice in the EU. Highlighting rule-rigging and unfair practices abroad might deflect from Britain's failings, but whether Brown attempts to bully his old rival Peter Mandelson, the EU trade commissioner, into watering down or abandoning the directive remains to be seen.

**THE chancellor was in more generous mood when addressing the Confederation of British Industry's annual conference in Birmingham, where he promised business more tax breaks and de-regulation in next week's pre-budget report.**

Brown couldn't resist reminding his audience of some more recent handouts, boasting that he would "build on our successful research and development tax credit to create the best incentives and make Britain the best place for R&D". Whoops! He somehow failed to mention that a recent Financial Times survey had shown that in the first full year of this tax credit, R&D spending in the UK fell by 1 percent.

When the R&D tax credit for multinationals was announced in Brown's 2001 budget, he proposed tax breaks only for *increased* R&D spending. By the time the credit was introduced a year later, various lobby groups had persuaded the chancellor to give tax breaks on all R&D spending. So the effect was to hand billions to companies for doing what they would have done anyway.

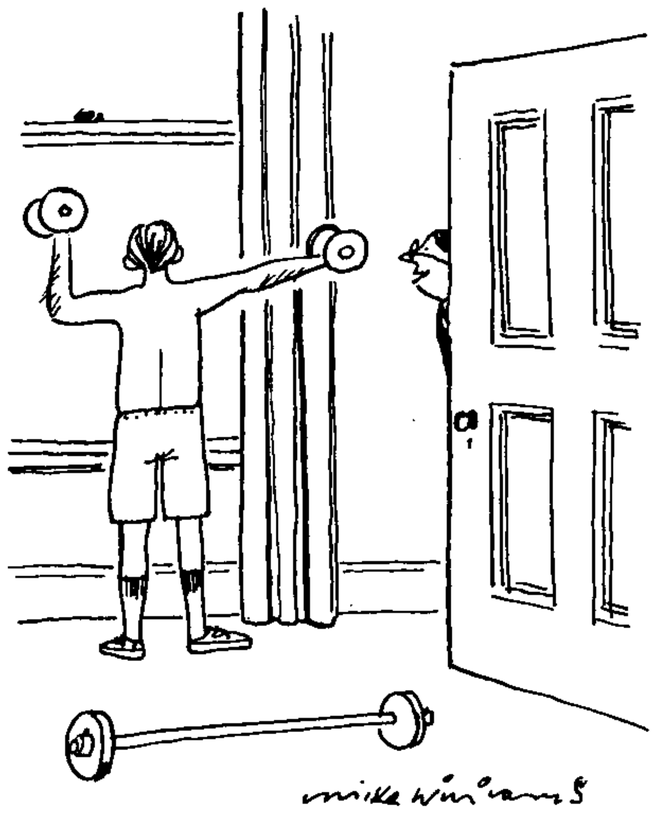
Among the successful lobbyists for the larger tax credit was the Pharmaceutical Industry Competitiveness Task Force, set up by the DTI in 1999 and including in its members science minister Lord Sainsbury and the chief executives of drugs companies AstraZeneca, Merck and GlaxoSmithKline. Glaxo is the largest beneficiary of the R&D tax credit, pocketing not far short of £100m each year – in return for which last year it *cut* its R&D spending by 5 percent!

**CBI president Sir John Sunderland was in rousing form when he addressed the assembled suits.**

After telling his audience how companies like his own had made Britain great, he lamented the "compensation culture" that poses a mortal danger to all this enterprise. "Too often now in Britain, the moment people feel any sort of pain they expect the state to be there and to do something about it. And increasingly, they also expect to be able to sue someone. 'Compensation', 'Blame', 'Victim', have almost become watch words in today's society," he said.

Sir John knows a thing or two about compensation and the art of suing. As executive chairman of Cadbury Schweppes plc, lead claimant in the "controlled foreign companies group litigation order", he is currently spearheading legal action against the government. The companies signed up to the order claiming that British tax laws designed to prevent them avoiding hundreds of millions of pounds in tax by shifting their profits to subsidiary companies in tax havens are illegal under European law.

For the "pain" of not being able to dodge its tax obligations, Cadburys is evidently glad to have found someone to sue – the rest of the country's taxpayers. Next stop for the companies' tax avoidance claims is the European court of justice, where "victims" like Sir John can expect a more sympathetic hearing.



*"Prime Minister, we have some CNN footage of a British soldier smoking in a restaurant in Fallujah"*

**AN example of how some MPs manage to treble their £57,000 salaries with expenses for staff, housing, travel and postage comes courtesy of the post bag of "new" Labour MP Oona King.**

The pro-Iraq war King is increasingly nervous at the prospect of a general election challenge for her Bethnal Bow & Green constituency from anti-war MP George Galloway. Hence she has been sending out vast amounts of unsolicited mail to constituents.

One recent letter concerning "safer neighbourhoods" outlined various government promises to increase the number of police officers, before helpfully giving the telephone number of the "Bow West Safer Neighbourhoods Team". "If you see an incident, or are the victim of a crime, you can ring them on..." trilled Oona. Her letter, on Commons notepaper, was mailed to residents in Bow West – duplicating the information already sent to them by Inspector Knacker and his Bow Street runners...

**ATTEMPTS to parachute former MEP Dr Mo O'Toole, aka the former Mrs Alan Milburn, into the Hartlepool seat vacated by Peter Mandelson have come unstuck.**

While the local party demanded a "local candidate", it cannot have helped her cause that throughout the north east she is known as "Dr Dolittle" thanks to her work as an MEP.

North-east party chiefs then hit on the brilliant idea of getting "Dolittle" out on the stump to call for a "yes" vote for the north-east regional assembly. Voters were very clear about what they thought of another expensive talking shop stuffed with people like, er, "Dolittle".

But help may be at hand in the shape of one-time chief whip Derek Foster, MP for the rock solid Labour seat of Bishop Auckland. Foster is apparently keen to serve out his remaining years in the Lords. So arise Lord Foster of Bishop Auckland just in time for the general election – just as "new" Labour foists Dolittle on unsuspecting comrades!

**MORE on government special adviser Richard Olzewski's desperate search for a seat.**

An adviser to health secretary John Reid, he has been ingratiating himself with the dwindling and long-suffering members of North Ayrshire Labour party, where doubtless he will be informing them of his selfless work for the area's retiring MP, Brian Wilson.

On previous occasions the well-travelled Olzewski has pinned his hopes on Birmingham Hodge Hill, Falkirk West and a few years ago was pipped to the post in another selection by the thrusting Douglas Alexander MP. If Olzweski's attendance record as a special adviser has taken a hammering of late, the hope must be that his attendance in the Commons – should he be selected – is also an improvement on his record as a north London councillor where the young Richard was nicknamed "No Show'.

**WEARY of long waits for answers, Ulster Unionist Lord Laird asked the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) on 10 September what it was doing "to improve the quality and speed of answers" to written questions.**

On 27 October the impatient lord tabled another question asking "when they will respond to the question for written answer tabled on September 10."

Finally, on 8 November, Baroness Amos replied that the NIO "strive to answer all questions as quickly and fully as possible" but the nature and volume of questions cause delays.

It's hard to see how it took more than two months to draft that reply.

**WHILE reporting that Robert Kilroy-Silk's research assistant, Tony Bennett, had threatened legal action against a website which mocked the great man (*Eye* 1118), we mentioned that Bennett was sentenced to 50 hours' community service two years ago for stealing 29 metric road signs.**

We have since learned that the conviction was overturned on appeal. Judge Keith Simpson gave Bennett an absolute discharge on the grounds that he hadn't been acting with dishonest intent when he removed the road signs, but was merely trying to enforce the 1984 traffic-sign regulations which specify that distances must be given in miles and yards.

## Number crunching

**$3.5bn** ■Annual GDP of West Bank and Gaza

**$6.5bn** ■Fortune amassed by Yasser Arafat

**THE Commons trade and industry committee has finally discovered the names of the companies who objected to the anti-bribery rules introduced in May by the department of trade's export credit guarantee department (ECGD) – and who immediately got their way when the ECGD greatly watered down the regulations.**

The influential exporters were Airbus, Rolls-Royce and BAE Systems, now the subject of a serious fraud office (SFO) investigation into slush funds related to its Saudi Arabian business (much of it guaranteed by the ECGD).

For months ministers had refused to name these firms. When asked by Lib Dem trade spokesman Malcolm Bruce in October whom they had talked to, trade minister Douglas Alexander reeled off a list of industry representative bodies such as the Confederation of British Industry and the British Bankers Association.

Mr Bruce had a bit more luck with a written answer to one of his parliamentary questions on the same day as the committee hearing. He wanted to know how many times DTI ministers had met these companies to discuss the rules. Mr Alexander this time admitted that his department had sat down with BAE six times to talk about them.

BAE was understandably a bit touchy on the point, its official spokesman snapping: "We are saying nothing. All questions should be referred to the CBI because they acted on behalf of the whole industry." Unfortunately this statement is flatly contradicted by the evidence that the company itself had direct and regular access to ministers, demonstrating an economy with the truth that might interest the SFO investigators.

**JOINED-UP government across Whitehall may be difficult, but even joined-up thinking within one person's brain seems beyond defence minister Lord Bach.**

Earlier this month Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer asked him what discussions the government had held with the US administration "with regard to the siting of a United States-controlled missile defence system in the United Kingdom". To which Lord Bach replied: "None, my Lords. There have been no such discussions."

Clear enough. Minutes later, however, Lord Wallace asked a similar question. "The government have not yet decided whether we need our own missile defences," Bach replied. "The US has offered to extend coverage and make missile defence capabilities available to the UK and other allies, should we require them."

How can the Americans have made this offer to the British if the two governments have never even discussed the subject? Telepathy, perhaps?

**SO MANY letters have been returned undelivered to the postroom at the department for environment, food and rural affairs that Defra bosses have issued tips on how to address an envelope.**

"When addressing outgoing mail, ensure that the address is typed or handwritten legibly," explains the notice. "The address should ideally be kept parallel to the longest side of the envelope. The address must fall within the address clear zone. There must be a clear zone all around the address of 5mm. This must not encroach on other clear zones. There must be a clear zone of 5mm around the address block, including any customer barcode."

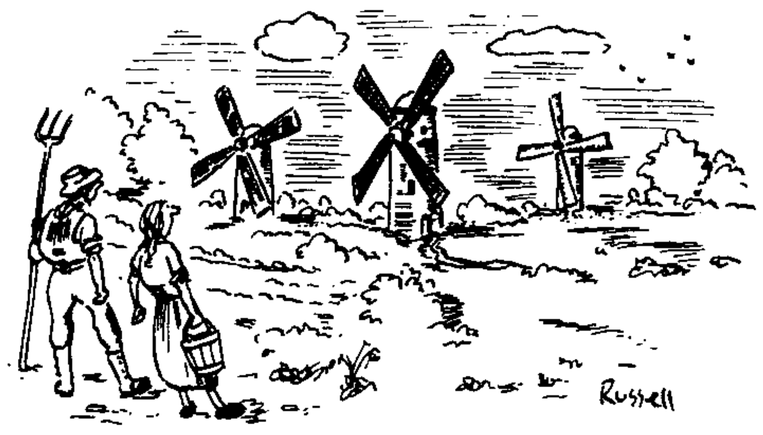
A further paragraph details how "the window size is constrained by the length of the address, font size, number of lines of the address, address boundaries and clear zones." For those who are still baffled, a set of diagrams "regarding the layout of an envelope" are available, via the internal computer system. Have they really nothing better to do?

**ONE of Scotland's most prominent Labour politicians, MSP and former minister Lord Watson, has been charged with "culpable and reckless fire-raising" after an incident at an Edinburgh hotel in the early hours of the morning following the Scottish Politician of the Year awards two weeks ago.**

The awards were sponsored by the Glasgow *Herald*, which has been following the story with great excitement ever since. Both the *Daily* and *Sunday Herald* ran front-page pictures taken by the hotel's security cameras soon after 2am which showed a kilted man (alleged to be Watson) bending down beside some curtains, which then caught fire. The photos also showed someone captioned merely as a "hotel guest" entering the room just as the blaze began.

This unidentified guest could have been a crucial witness, but alas – after an evening's merriment – he was apparently oblivious to what was happening and thus missed what has turned into one of the biggest stories in Scottish politics this year. Who he? None other than Richard Walker, editor of the *Sunday Herald*!

*'Backbiter'*




*"In my opinion, they ruin the landscape"*

## WIND POWER

**A COMPANY given £12m of public money to build an offshore windfarm in the Moray Firth is being sued over alleged collaboration with genocide in Sudan.**

Talisman Energy Inc, the Canadian parent company of Talisman UK, faces court action in the US from the Presbyterian Church of Sudan and a number of tribesmen and women who claim they were forced from their homes in southern Sudan. The displacement of the civilian population was very convenient for Talisman, allowing it to explore for and extract oil. Talisman denies the allegations of collaboration, but the firm plainly carried on working in Sudan while tens of thousands of people were killed in government attacks around the oil fields. It sold its Sudanese holdings in 2002.

The case has been lodged since 2001 and the US court has rejected numerous applications by Talisman to have it dismissed. Notwithstanding these accusations, Talisman has gathered lots of public money to help pay for its £24m windfarm demonstrator off the coast of Scotland. The department of trade and industry coughed up £3m, as did the Scottish Executive, while the EU gave more than £6m. So much for promoting corporate social responsibility.

If Talisman eventually loses the case, it will certainly jeopardise its plans to expand the two wind turbine test site into a 200-turbine wind farm. That will be a relief to the fishing fleet, which stands to lose access to eight square miles of sea, but would be bad news for renewable energy and a terrible waste of all that taxpayers' money.

## *Down On The Farm*

**THOUSANDS of farmers might well have followed with interest the finding by a Wiltshire coroner that the death 51 years ago of an RAF NCO constituted "unlawful killing".**

Ronald Maddison died in 1953 when he was taking part in a series of experiments at Porton Down, the secret chemical warfare research establishment. Like thousands of others, he was told he was helping scientists to find a cure for the common cold. In fact they were dripping on to his skin a highly toxic nerve agent, Sarin. He went into convulsions, foaming at the mouth, and within an hour he was dead. On home office insistence his inquest was held in secret and its verdict was simply "death by misadventure".

For decades the government continued to hide the true cause of Maddison's death, until in 1999, thanks to the efforts of his family and colleagues, history was made by the decision of Wiltshire police to reopen his case. This month the Trowbridge coroner ripped aside the official cover-up, ruling that Maddison had been unlawfully killed by experiments which had no connection with the common cold, and were intended solely to test nerve-gas chemicals for military purposes.

Almost immediately it was suggested the government may now face compensation claims running into many millions of pounds on behalf of other ex-servicemen damaged by exposure to sarin. And why is this relevant to farmers? Simply that sarin is a compound of organo-phosphorus, that family of chemicals which includes the OP pesticides sheep farmers were forced by the government to use over nearly 20 years for treating animal parasites.

Although the farmers were consistently assured by those governments that OPs were safe, the result was an epidemic of ill-health that raged across Britain's sheep-farming communities in ways entirely compatible with the damage done to the nervous and immune system by any organo-phosphorus nerve-agent.

The parallels between the sarin story and that of the sheep dip which destroyed the health of so many farmers and their families are uncanny. In each case the government went out of its way to hide the potentially deadly risk these chemicals posed to those in contact with them. Although the properties of sarin and sheep dip are not identical, they have enough overlap to produce similar symptoms – loss of muscular control, convulsions, salivation, eye-damage, incontinence, change of personality.

Sarin may be more immediately deadly, but the effects of sheep dip may be more long-lasting. And in each case the official response of government, as soon as it realised what was going on, was to use all means at its disposal to deny and conceal the disaster it had set in train.

Through the 1990s this column reported year after year on "the great OPs cover up": on how ministers and officials persistently lied in their efforts to deny there was any connection between the use of chemicals officially licensed as safe to use and the trail of tragedies visited on their unwitting victims. Similar denials became familiar when thousands of servicemen returning from the first Gulf war reported similar health damage. The motivation of the government was its fear, firstly of the outcry which would follow if it admitted the truth, and secondly of the blizzard of compensation claims which might follow if it did so.

That Trowbridge coroner has at last lifted the veil on part of the official cover-up. How long will it be before the truth about the rest is brought to light?

*'Muckspreader'*

*"It's to keep John Prescott off"*

# EYE TV

## EastEnders (BBC1)

**A CHILL wind blows through Elstree, home of the UK's second-best loved TV soap opera. The lowest ever rating for the show cost the last executive producer her job, and a new one is getting to work. Already the unloved Ferreira family have been elbowed, guilty of all still living together after the age of 30 and, in one case, having unfeasibly topiarised facial hair.**

Sir Dirty Den, ageing hard man and onanist, has been next to go, saving the BBC £200,000 a year that it really should have been spending on biscuits for executive meetings. Viewers wait to see who will be next. Actors wait to see who will be next. These must be nervous times for the cast. Nothing could be more terrifying than reading next week's script and finding that your character has a slight cough. On Albert Square, there really never is any smoke without fire.

Does any of this matter? Should any of us care? For while we all like to see good work being done, there's something about the dominance of soaps in popular culture that inspires a certain *Schadenfreude*. The decline of **EastEnders** has been watched with dismay by its many fans and with glee by almost everyone else. This strange and artificial show, hermetically sealed from the outside world (where few of its inhabitants ever venture); where everyone of all ages meets three times a day in the only local pub (none of whose bar staff are South African); where there is no known racism and no one ever swears; where all middle-class characters are innately villainous and not be trusted; and where no one seems to own a washing machine, thus necessitating regular visits to the laundromat to have drab, gloomy conversations with Pauline... this strange and artificial show has nonetheless become the most important programme on BBC TV.

It has come to represent the creative health of the corporation in a way that makes no sense if you think about it for more than 0.3 of a second. It's the flagship – the ship your enemies would want to sink first. So its decline does matter, and needs to be addressed quickly, for *EastEnders*, like all soaps, is a slow-moving vehicle. Storylines are

prepared anything up to a year in advance, and even the lowliest actors are on six-month contracts and so cannot immediately be disposed of if they turn out to be no good. Which means we will be stuck for a while with the Miller family: ghastly fishwife mum, slobbish armchair philosopher dad, two hopeless artful dodger kids straight out of Italia Conti.

How on earth were such unlikeable characters introduced in the first place? One outlandish theory has it that they were brought in for comedy value, but sadly the writers can't write comedy, and the actors hired can't play it. Several *EastEnders* fans known to Couch Potato now watch the show only on tape so they can fast-forward through any scene unfortunate enough to contain the Miller family.

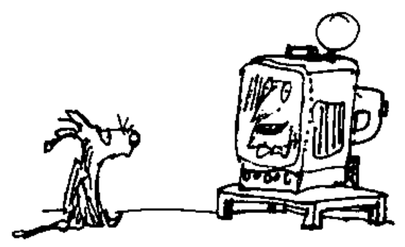
All soaps, though, have their weaknesses: it's when you ignore your strengths that you really get into trouble. One of the greatest strengths of *EastEnders* in recent years has been the relationship between Alfie and Kat.

The characters are hugely popular, the actors have an obvious rapport and there are thousands of things the two of them could do together, even at 7.30 on a Thursday evening. But in *EastEnders* no relationship can stay still, let alone prosper. All happy, loving couples must be ripped apart in horrendous circumstances, for this is what the writers and producers regard as real drama. Or maybe they just don't have the talent or imagination to come up with anything else. But in wasting the Alfie/Kat romance so wilfully, they have weakened the appeal of the entire show. Viewers need characters to like and identify with: if there are none, they lose interest.

Can the flagship be sunk? It seems unlikely, despite mischievous suggestions to the contrary by all the usual tabloid gobshites. Even so, the axing of *Brookside* a year ago by Channel 4 must have set a few hearts a-flutter. That decision, which seemed a little drastic at the time, now seems bold and far-sighted. The real problem with *EastEnders* is a structural one: at four episodes a week, it has become a sausage machine, relentless in its need for new stories. Increasing output from three to four episodes a week was a commercial, ratings-led decision. If Mark Thompson really does want to reassert the corporation's commitment to public service broadcasting, the bold and far-sighted decision here would be to go back to three episodes a week. The argument is simple: quality over quantity. It's also an argument TV executives no longer seem to understand. And they wonder why people aren't watching.

*'Couch Potato'*

# MEDIA NEWS



**BBC director-general Mark Thompson's weekly email message "Hello Everyone" continues to be coy about the "significant change" (ie redundancies) predicted across the BBC following the Shape Our Future review.**

Nevertheless the latest White City rumour is that he believes there are "too many senior broadcast journalists" in newsgathering and a cull is imminent.

This might be good news for News 24, where a lack of viewers is a big embarrassment for a channel that costs £50m a year. More of its programming will appear on terrestrial channels. But it's bad news for the *One O'Clock News* on BBC1 which will be replaced by a live feed from News 24.

BBC Radio Five Live (hideously overstaffed), TV sport and children's programmes could all move to a new "production cluster" in Manchester. And even more light entertainment TV will be made by independent producers, leading to production job losses at TV Centre.

Staff meanwhile have been studying closely Michael Grade's speech to the CBI about BBC Online, where he has singled out gardening, antiques, game shows and soap content as ripe for cutting. There's no reason to believe his taste will be any different when it comes to telly.

The bottom line? Recent "half of all workforce faces sack" headlines are an exaggeration, but half of all *production* jobs could well go.

**THOUGH Thompson is urging staff to take no notice of the wilder figures being bandied around, most BBC staff have also received a spoof version of his email which they suspect may well be closer to the truth.**

"I wanted to build on the good work done by Greg in the Making It Happen drive and the subsequent Just Imagine campaign. I can now confirm that this evolving process has entered a new stage, to be called Just Fuck Off...

"All staff will be issued with a 350-page laminated gatefold information pack setting out why they have become parasites on the licence-fee-payer. Each of these packs will include a free JustFuckOff branded pencil, rubber, mouse mat, bankruptcy application form, services for the homeless telephone directory and a cyanide capsule. Best wishes and Happy Christmas!!"

**REDUNDANCIES are on the cards at ITV as the commercial broadcaster continues to shed its commitment to regional coverage.**

Granada (50 jobs to go), Anglia (30) and Meridian (25) are all losing regional opt-out current affairs programmes thanks to some nifty lobbying of Ofcom. ITV wants the watchdog to agree that regional programmes are of "low value" to viewers and of even lower value to advertisers. There is every sign it will get its way.

**WHEN is a pooled report from Iraq not a pooled report? When something really happens, of course.**

Endless footage of US marines assaulting buildings, blowing up minarets and chowing down with embedded reporters have flooded screens since the start of the assault on Fallujah. But when an NBC crew suddenly nabbed a scoop – the on-screen execution of a wounded insurgent – NBC immediately claimed all the credit for itself.

**RICHARD "Dirty" Desmond is a firm believer in cross-promotion within his media empire, with listings for his Television X Fantasy Channel appearing alongside those for the BBC and ITV in the *Daily Express*, the programme titles censored to protect the sensibilities of more delicate readers.**

More recently, however, the favour has been returned. Adverts for Desmond's *Daily Star* now regularly pop up in the midst of Television X's 10-minute free hourly previews, which is enough to put even the most dedicated one-handed viewer off his stroke.

**SO MUCH for the brand new *Culture Show* on BBC2.**

Staff are already calling it by its proper name – *The Charter Renewal Show* – and, to prove it's only there to placate Tessa Jowell, it even includes output from the regions. Won't the culture secretary be pleased!

## DUMB BRITAIN

*Beg, Borrow Or Steal, BBC2*

**Jamie Theakston**: Which 19th-century author wrote Lady Windermere's Fan?

**Contestant** (*having had several minutes to think about it and discuss it with other contestants*): Ben Elton.

**Theakston**: In which English county is the peninsula known as "the Lizard"?

**Contestant**: Shropshire.

**Theakston**: Who became president of the National Union of Mineworkers in 1981?

**Contestant**: Margaret Thatcher.

*Q103, Cambridgeshire*

**Presenter**: Which country is the film Troy set in?

**Contestant**: Mexico.

## CEEFUX

THE subtitles for the BBC's *Ten O'Clock News* are produced live as the show is broadcast, which can lead to confusion – or simple Freudian slips, as in the report on Yasser Arafat's death on 11 November, during which it was announced that the UN had held "a minute's violence" to commemorate his passing.

**TANNING**
**Beau-bronz full body spray tan.....£25**
**+ get a friend spayed for half price**

*Advertisement, Macclesfield Times*

# STAGGWATCH

## Suspect reporting

**"Exclusive. RACHEL'S MURDER: A NEW SUSPECT." With this huge headline the *Daily Mail* revealed on 8 November that "a convicted sex-killer has sensationally emerged as the prime suspect for Rachel Nickell's murder". A day later, in another front-page splash, the *Mail* named the new suspect as Robert Napper, currently detained in Broadmoor.**

Sensational indeed – except for anyone who remembered the *Mail*'s front-page story of 10 October 1995, the day after Napper was sent to Broadmoor for a frenzied and fatal knife attack on another young mother and her daughter. The paper's front page story that day – "DID HE KILL RACHEL TOO?" – reported that detectives now wanted to question him about the Nickell murder.

Readers of the *Mail* and other papers could be forgiven for not recalling that Napper had been identified as a suspect nine years ago. For during the intervening period they have consistently been led to believe – with many a nod and wink – that the probable culprit was the original suspect, Colin Stagg who was found not guilty or whatever.

**September 1994:** "I don't feel in the least bit sorry for Stagg," David Mellor writes in the *Mail on Sunday*. As a "known deviant", Colin Stagg "has only himself to blame that he was a suspect". What most incenses Mellor is that Stagg can never be tried again for the murder "even if the police suspicions are right, and stronger evidence against him were now to be found".

**September 1996:** Two years on from Stagg's acquittal, the *Daily Mail* breathlessly reports that Rachel Nickell's family are planning a civil action against Colin Stagg. The effect of this brilliant scoop is only slightly dampened by the fact that Rachel's father immediately denies planning anything of the sort.

**October 1996:** The gloves are now off as the *Mail on Sunday* publishes a hatchet-job on Stagg by its crime correspondent Chester Stern, a former Scotland Yard press officer, based on selective quotations from "evidence" which the police would have presented had his trial gone ahead. A week later, in another two-page feature taunting Stagg, Stern claims that in publishing the prosecution case "the *Mail on Sunday* sought to make no judgments at all. Simply to argue that, if only for the sake of the victim's family, the case ought to have been heard." Because of the not guilty verdict, Stern adds indignantly, "Stagg cannot stand trial for Rachel's murder again, even if new evidence came to light which incriminated him."

**August 1997:** The *Daily Mail* reports with some regret that Stagg has abandoned plans to sue the police. "Senior police officers had hoped that Stagg would carry out his threat to sue," it explains, "as this would have resulted in him giving evidence in court and being cross-examined. 'We could have given 101 reasons why we arrested and then charged Stagg,' one officer said." A few days later Norman Tebbit illustrates his *Mail on Sunday* column with a photo of Stagg walking his dog in Richmond Park. "In this picture he is dressed just in dark shorts and in another he is wearing a scruffy pinkish singlet," Tebbit notes, damningly. "In my opinion Stagg is potentially a very dangerous man who should be closely watched, and women who walk alone – or with dogs – in Richmond Park should be aware of the risk of encountering him… home secretary Jack Straw should do something to protect the public against dangerous men like Stagg." Alas, Straw's hands are tied because "there is no power to retry someone found not guilty, even if new evidence suggests the verdict was wrong. Perhaps there should be."

**July 2000:** "Starting today," the *Daily Mail* announces proudly, "a series revealing the inside secrets of the hunt for the maniac who butchered a mother on Wimbledon Common." The series is based on a book by Keith Pedder, the detective inspector who led the murder inquiry. Pedder's main purpose, the *Mail* points out, is to justify his handling of the case and repeat "his clear belief that Colin Stagg got away with murder".

**July 2001:** The *Daily Mail* has an exclusive interview with Rachel Nickell's former boyfriend, who urges the government to scrap the double jeopardy rule so that Stagg can be prosecuted again for Rachel's murder.

**November 2004:** News of the Napper link breaks. Cue much hand-wringing from embarrassed hacks? Not a bit of it. Strangely, the *Mail on Sunday* has lost all interest in the case. The *Daily Mail* prefers to focus on the bumbling detective work that blinded Knacker to Napper's possible guilt. A senior lawyer tells the paper: "Mr Stagg appears to have a very credible claim for up to £1m in compensation. Here we have an innocent man who, as a result of a very poor police investigation, was charged with murder and held in custody for over a year. He has been pilloried and his life totally destroyed."

And who has been responsible for much of that pillorying? Oddly the *Mail* neglects to tell us.

● *See In The Back, page 26.*

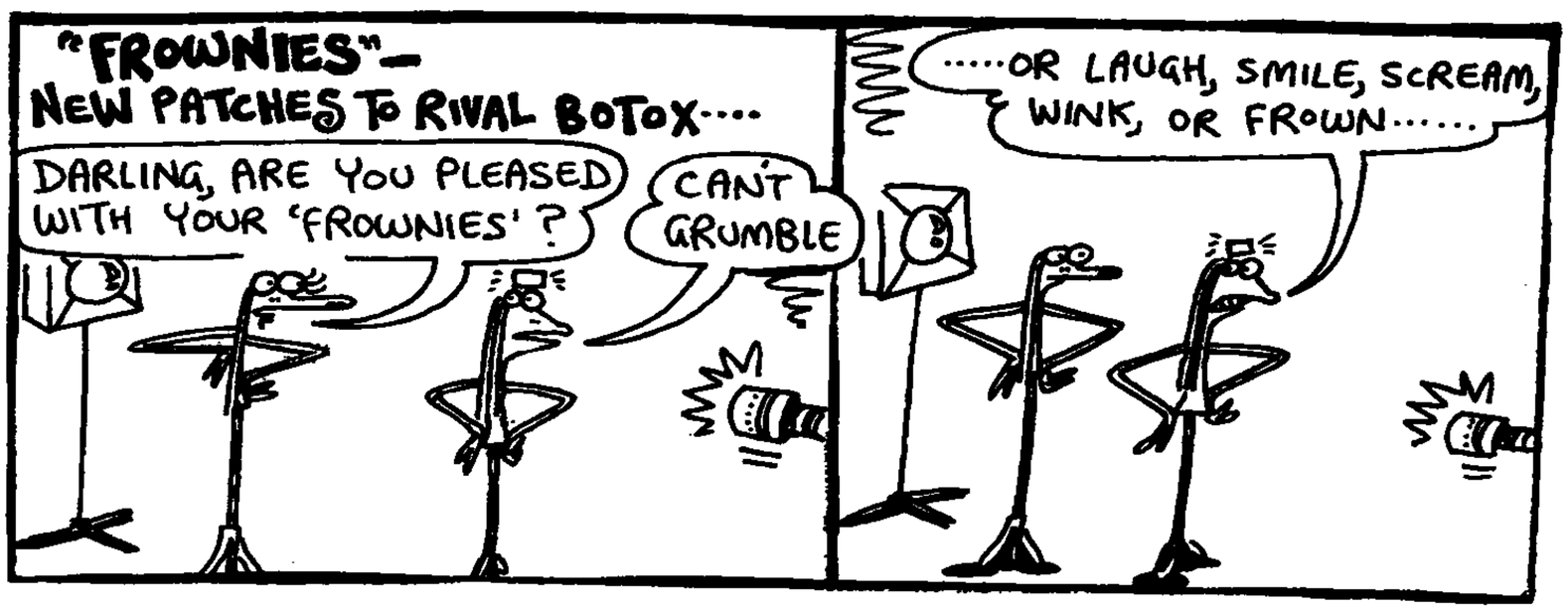
## I-SKY

*"Back in 1974 there was no Sky Sports and the only soccer matches you could watch were on Saturdays."*

— *Sun* feature, "30 reasons why we're better off now than we were 30 years ago"

# SUPERMODELS

KERBER


"FROWNIES"— NEW PATCHES TO RIVAL BOTOX....
DARLING, ARE YOU PLEASED WITH YOUR 'FROWNIES'?
CAN'T GRUMBLE
.....OR LAUGH, SMILE, SCREAM, WINK, OR FROWN.....

# DOING THE ROUNDS

**ACCORDING to the general medical council (GMC), there may be as many as 13,000 drug or alcohol-addicted doctors working in the NHS. Not only that, but when M.D. spoke at this year's Edinburgh medical school graduation ball, around a quarter of the new doctors were smoking.**

These alarming estimations are worth digesting, along with the government's public health white paper. Doctors are just as fallible as anyone else and most feel distinctly uneasy at its moralising tone.

It's also absurdly hypocritical. Having accepted the evidence that passive smoking isn't good for bar workers, health secretary John "Oh fuck, not health" Reid has decided that it's OK to carry on killing the staff in pubs where no food is served. But by far the biggest risk is to smokers themselves. Packing them into ghettos where the only food is salt-laden fat snacks that clog the arteries and make them drink even more is a sure recipe for premature death.

It also seems bizarre to restrict smoking at a time when drinking and gambling are being extended. Reid tries to make the distinction between an individual's autonomous right to live an unhealthy life and the unacceptability of putting others at risk through, say, passive smoking. But other people's smoke causes far less collateral damage than either gambling or alcohol. Family neglect, depression, domestic and street violence, unemployment, bankruptcy, theft and road fatalities cast a far longer shadow over the nation's health than a slight increase in lung cancer.

If Reid's argument is to be followed through, immunisations may soon become compulsory since a failure to vaccinate your children also puts others at risk, as the recent measles and mumps outbreaks testify. And cigarettes, alcohol and fast food should be banned outright because the vast chunk of NHS resources they swallow up prevents others with less high profile illnesses (eg epilepsy or dementia) getting a decent service.

Reid is right to point out that those born in Dorset live, on average, 11 years longer than those born in Glasgow. But what is the solution? If you've no job, no future and no self-esteem, you're unlikely to do half an hour of high intensity aerobic exercise every day. At the other extreme, doctors have the most secure jobs imaginable and yet still lead dangerously unhealthy lives as they buckle under the pressure of government-induced expectation.

Reid deserves some credit for trying to put public health back on the map; but as M.D. has pointed out, the specialty was decimated in the last health reorganisation. Forty years ago, Bristol had 28 public health consultants. It now has six. In some smaller primary care trusts (PCTs), you're lucky to find a single public health specialist. Instead Reid is placing great store in "health MOTs for all" – a strategy that has no evidence basis and is likely to send more GPs to an early grave under the weight of the worried well.

A more productive strategy would be to keep the elderly warm. Each winter, Britain has 40,000 excess deaths among the elderly compared to many colder countries, largely because of a fear of heating bills. Most public health inequality is rooted in poverty and the white paper does nothing to address this. Indeed, a recent poll of 2,000 NHS mangers found that only 16 percent agreed with the statement: "The government takes public health seriously."

*M.D.*

## off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

GOOD SIGNS...
NOW WASH YOUR HANDS!
BUT SHOULDN'T THEY BE ON THE ACTUAL WARDS?
HAVE YOU WASHED YOUR HANDS?
NO, THEY'RE MORE SUITED TO MANAGEMENT
ALWAYS WASH YOUR HANDS
SORRY, NOT OUR REMIT

# SIGNAL FAILURES

## Scotch Horror

**ONE of the most bizarre aspects of transport under "new" Labour is that the Scottish secretary (Alistair Darling) controls railways in England (where he's also the transport secretary) but not in Scotland where rail comes under the control of the Scottish Executive.**

A wide gap is opening up between rail services in the two countries as "Two Jobs" buggers up England's railways knowing it won't affect his chances of re-election because his constituents in Edinburgh will never notice what he's doing.

For example, a new northern England franchise begins next month with no upgrades included and only minimal subsidy from the government.

Meanwhile Scotland is to get 29 more new trains. Its new franchise promises investment at all stations and more subsidy each year. The line linking Gordon Brown's constituency in Dunfermline to Darling's in Edinburgh, for example, is getting longer platforms for longer trains – just like the longer platforms and trains for Hampshire commuters which Darling scuppered. A new track is being built for a local service from Larkhall to Glasgow, just like the services Darling wants axed in northern England.

Darling also stopped the long-standing grants for switching freight from road to rail, but only in England; meanwhile Scotland has spent millions on new facilities and is restoring a disused railway to relieve the Forth bridge. Darling has blocked tram schemes for Manchester, Leeds and Portsmouth but the one for his own constituency is progressing.

The official explanation for this dichotomy, which suits Darling and Brown so well, is Scottish devolution. (Wales, though it has an assembly and Welsh secretary, still has its railways controlled by the Scottish secretary and the new Welsh franchise is as miserly as the new northern one). Regional transport executives in England now fear that Darling will remove their powers to specify train services, to stop them supporting and developing services with Scottish-style subsidies. Devolution is more a convenient smokescreen than a "new" Labour principle.

Interesting fact: Since Edinburgh Central MP Alistair Darling became English transport secretary, three rail stations have opened in Edinburgh (population 450,000), one in England (pop 49.1m) and none in Wales (pop 2.9m).

**WHEN TransPennine Express (TPE) began cancelling masses of services on 1 November, new franchisees FirstGroup and Keolis said the reason was "service reliability during the autumn period" – suggesting that leaves on the line were to blame and it was Network Rail's problem.**

The real reasons, withheld from passengers, were poor train maintenance and a dispute with drivers (so WorstGroup and Keolis were responsible). But at least extra carriages were promised on the services that weren't cancelled.

Five days later an *Eye* reader became a TPE victim when travelling from London to Durham. His GNER train was diverted to Leeds because of a derailment the previous day. A shuttle train was promised from Leeds to York but didn't materialise, so passengers waited for the next TPE train. It had just two carriages – the shortest train TPE can provide. "The whole of a mainline GNER train was so dangerously crammed into two carriages that the surly platform staff had to bark at some passengers to get off, as there was not enough room for the guard to get on," says the reader.

**OFFICIALS engaged in re-inventing the wheel are struggling to find a better rail "incentive" scheme. The current one sees franchisees fining Network Rail for delays caused by infrastructure and NR fining the franchises for delays they cause. By 2001 the industry already employed 300 people to argue over the causes of delays.**

Now the office of rail regulation (ORR) wants NR to be liable for all delays. That would reduce the blame culture but leave private train franchises to cut costs without worrying about fines for the resulting delays.

In the days when we knew wheels should be round, there was no blame culture because tracks and trains were managed together.

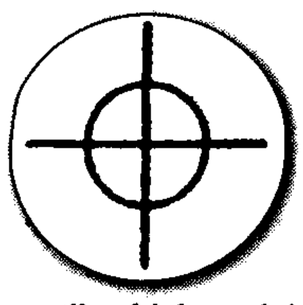
*'Dr B. Ching'*
*England's part-time transport secretary*

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

# TARGET FOR RIDICULE

ONE of the worst-performing departments of one of Britain's worst-performing county councils – Cumbria – has come up with a brilliant idea to stop the cycle of decline.

Last week the council's social services directorate was given a "nil star" rating by the commission for social care improvement for the second year in a row. Last year the Tory / Lib Dem council as a whole had the distinction of slipping from "fair" to "weak" in official ratings.



Every member of the social services department has now been issued with a transparent plastic drinks coaster *(sic)*, carrying a "target" logo of a cross in a circle. Accompanying it is a letter from Colin Pritchard, "head of performance management", which explains how to use a coaster.

"What's your problem? You're thirsty. What's your objective? To have a drink. What are your options? Tea/coffee/water. What do you need to do? Make yourself a drink. Have you achieved your objective? Yes / No, you're still thirsty. What have you learnt? A drink satisfies thirst. The coaster prevents unsightly ring marks on your desk. How can you improve? Check to see if anybody else would like a drink. Check that others are using their coasters…"

A pathetic waste of time and money? Not at all, says Pritchard. By following the "On Target model", he asserts, "we can all make improvements to the way we work and achieve better outcomes for service users and their carers". Encouraging words indeed for the county's battered wives, abused children and neglected oldies!

# TORIES ON THE TAKE

RESIDENTS of Hillingdon, north-west London, hope a forthcoming district auditor's report into allegations of corruption in the planning department will not prove to be a whitewash.

The DA was called in by planning minister Keith Hill after local Labour MP John McDonnell lifted the lid on the scandal in the Commons in June. He told MPs that many smelled a rat after the Tory council won a £500,000 government grant in recognition of its speed and efficiency in processing planning applications. Yet anyone who had had anything to do with Hillingdon's planning department knew that was codswallop.

When Labour councillor Janet Duncan called for a review of the department's performance, the Tories refused. Chief executive Dorian Leatham would not allow an independent investigation. Cllr Duncan was denied access to information and refused entry to meetings discussing the issue. But whistleblowers in the planning department revealed that the performance statistics were fraudulent, with forged dates and decisions backdated in order to meet government targets. The true figure for decisions reached on time was 24 percent, not the 68 percent claimed.

Leatham was forced to hold an internal inquiry. But confidence in its impartiality was not boosted by the appointment of Jean Palmer – the head of planning and the person responsible for the performance statistics – to head it.

No wonder the council was anxious to prevent staff being interviewed by the district auditor. It sought legal advice as to whether they could be ordered not to talk, and there have been rumours of bullying and intimidation. It remains to be seen whether it worked.

**● THE Sunderland Housing Group, the housing association run by that city's former housing director Peter Walls (*Eye* 1118), has brought m'learned friends in to scour a website (www.dadsplace.co.uk) critical of the way SHG has handled the city's housing stock since transfer in 2001. As the lawyers in question are rapacious libel solicitors Carter-Fuck, it's a good job Sunderland's tenants, not Walls himself, will be footing the bill.**

# GRIM FOR JIM

FORMER Lincolnshire council leader Jim Speechley – winner of Rotten Boroughs' Brass-Necked Councillor of the Year award in 2002 – finally threw in the towel last week and resigned as a councillor after his appeal against conviction for misconduct in public office was dismissed.

After a hearing lasting a day and a half, it took just five minutes for Lord Justice Kennedy, Mr Justice Bell and Mr Justice Hughes to decide to throw out Speechley's appeal.

Despite receiving an 18-month jail sentence at his trial in April, which heard how the 67-year-old farmer had attempted to change the route of a by-pass to boost the value of land he owned, Speechley had refused to resign pending his appeal. In dismissing it Lord Justice Kennedy told the court Speechley had known the value of his land would increase if his preferred route was chosen and he had pressed for it "using the full weight of his office and personality to further the cause… This was not a case of oversight: it was dishonesty that was the driving force".

Released from prison in August, Speechley is believed to have been the first councillor to have attended meetings wearing an electronic tag.

**● TAXPAYERS question the actions of Derby city council at their peril. Resident Richard Butler hoisted a banner across the front of his house on behalf of a local action group, derbyHEART, protesting at plans to redevelop the city centre. The council responded by taking Mr Butler to court, claiming the banner was an advertisement for which he did not have planning permission. Mr Butler was found guilty, given a conditional discharge and ordered to pay the council's costs of £1,706.**

# ORDER OF THE BOOT

FOUR YEARS AGO Labour-run Waltham Forest council approved plans to regenerate Walthamstow High Street. The proposals included a state-of-the-art library and arts centre.

However, having finally cleared the site earmarked for the library and arts centre, councillors have had a last-minute change of heart. Rather than cough-up their agreed share of £1m toward the £4.5m needed for the project, they have decided to trouser £7m by selling the helpfully cleared land to developer Henry Boot, who intends to build houses on it.

The local government ombudsman has received a complaint from the chair of Waltham Forest arts council, Bob Gray, who wants to know why the council's cabinet abandoned the project without consultation and relied on a secret scrutiny overview committee meeting to rubber-stamp the change. For good measure the council is planning to sell off assembly halls in Chingford and Walthamstow, leaving the borough without a public performance venue.

## EDUCASHUN NEWZ

**THERE'S no such thing as a free school lunch – and certainly not in Newcastle where the council is bidding for a £125m grant under the government's Building Schools for the Future scheme.**

The money will help repair and rebuild the city's schools; but the council has been told it doesn't stand a chance of getting a penny of taxpayers' cash if its business plan doesn't include a new "city academy" – to be run by former Tory tax exile Lord Irvine Laidlaw!

City academies are Tony Blair's pet education project: schools that are free from local authority control, allowed to cream off the best pupils and then handed to various millionaires in return for a small investment. In Newcastle, teachers and Unison support staff were shocked to learn that their new academy would be run by the top Tory donor.

Why the disquiet? For a start the deal would mean closing the successful West Gate Community College; but questions are also being asked about what kind of role model Laidlaw provides. Though he now aspires to philanthropy and says he is keen to help poor children in inner city Britain, in the past he has lived as a tax exile in Monaco and avoided contributing to schools in the normal way.

He only returned to Britain to take up a seat in the House of Lords, nominated by the Conservative party to which, funnily enough, he has donated well over £2m.

**IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON** KNIFE & PACKER

SORRY, GUYS, BUT YOU TWO JUST AREN'T CUT OUT FOR FRONT LINE SERVICE...
ST JOHN AMBULANCE
BUT WE'VE GIVEN EVERYTHING WE'VE GOT!!!
EXACTLY! AND A "MUSTARD AND BERGAMOT COMPRESS" IS NOT WHAT YOU GIVE TO A HEART ATTACK VICTIM...
WE'RE LOSING HIM!!! MORE DIJON, QUIN!!!

# NOOKS and CORNERS

**MORE on conflicts of interest at CABE, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, a public body with more than 70 staff and an annual budget of £12m.**

Readers will recall the kerfuffle over the redevelopment plans of Stanhope plc for South Kensington Station (now happily listed) and the fact that eight out of the 15 CABE commissioners had professional connections with that property development company largely owned and run by the chairman, Sir Stuart Lipton.

Independent auditor AHL Ltd was asked to investigate CABE; and in June, shortly before its watered down report was released, Lipton resigned his chairmanship. A select committee of the office of the deputy prime minister is now reviewing CABE's role.

These hearings have been highly entertaining and the evidence interesting. A constant theme is the lack of transparency in CABE's proceedings and interventions, and its perceived bias in favour of new development.

Such criticism has been made forcefully by everyone from the Law Society ("CABE has assumed a voice in the planning system beyond its original remit") to the joint committee of the national amenity societies ("It can help create a pro-development bias in the decision-making process which is not in the public interest.") SAVE Britain's Heritage, meanwhile, is concerned that "as CABE has evolved there has been a blurring of boundaries and the interface has become too much skewed towards promoting development... whilst the public and other stakeholders are kept in the dark."

But by far the most sensational evidence has emerged from Surrey's answer to Detroit: Croydon. Councillor Adrian Dennis (Lab), the cabinet member for planning, the environment and urban development for the London borough, has told the select committee of a perceived conflict of interest between Lipton's role as a private developer and his chairmanship of CABE over proposals for prime land next to East Croydon Station known as the Croydon Gateway site.

The council had been anxious to promote a mixed use development here and in 2002 asked the Arrowcroft Group plc to implement this, backed by compulsory purchase powers. According to Cllr Dennis: "This proposal has very widespread support from Croydon residents, businesses, and agencies and politicians across London." However, Lipton then sought meetings with the council and "in these meetings the line between Sir Stuart's role as a private developer and his chairmanship of CABE was blurred. Over a period, it became clear that Sir Stuart was seeking to take over the Croydon Gateway development in his private capacity..."

In 2003 the Gateway Partnership – Stanhope backed by Schroeders – submitted its own scheme for an office development for roughly the same site – what Cllr Dennis describes as a "sort of attack from well-funded private sector interests who are determined to circumvent democratic processes for their own gain."

It is all very complicated. The council only owns a portion of the site, and Stanhope owns another portion, but 43 percent is owned by British Rail Residuary together with Network Rail (on whose advisory board for property, it emerges, sits Sir Stuart Lipton).

The council was not told that CABE commissioner Paul Morrell, quantity surveyor to Stanhope, had a relevant interest, nor that another professional adviser on the scheme, the architect Ken Shuttleworth, was about to be made a CABE commissioner. Furthermore, at the public inquiry into the development scheme in summer 2003, Stanhope was represented by Herbert Smith who, at the time, were also solicitors for CABE (which, on the whole, thought the Gateway scheme "a strong and coherent proposition") and who, a week before the inquiry opened, actually proposed that CABE backed a "Design Protocol" to ensure "design quality" if the Gateway scheme went ahead (an idea that CABE sensibly declined).

This extraordinary story is far from over, with Stanhope battling on to develop the Gateway site contrary to the council's intentions (and with Michael Moore, of Prudential Property Investments, which recently sold part of the Gateway site, now on CABE's design review committee).

Clearly Cllr Dennis has his own agenda and did not help his case when it emerged in oral evidence that, in an internal council report, he had referred to various developers as "Mr Slime" and "Mr Dud" [*see* http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmodpm.htm#evid]. However, all this is surely of public interest, especially as Sue Street, permanent secretary at the Department of Culture, Media 'n' Sport, was hauled before the parliamentary committee on standards in public life last July to give evidence about CABE and what has been learned from the AHL report.

Oddly little has been reported in the property or architectural press. Obviously the reticence of the *Architects' Journal* is because architects like developers and hate amenity societies – and not because the former editor and now group editorial director, Paul Finch, is currently, er, acting chairman of CABE.

Who will step into Lipton's shoes at CABE? Chris Smith MP seems to be the front-runner. His qualifications obviously include having no professional connection with Stanhope plc – although he was the secretary of state who oversaw the disastrous appointment of Lipton as the first chairman of CABE.

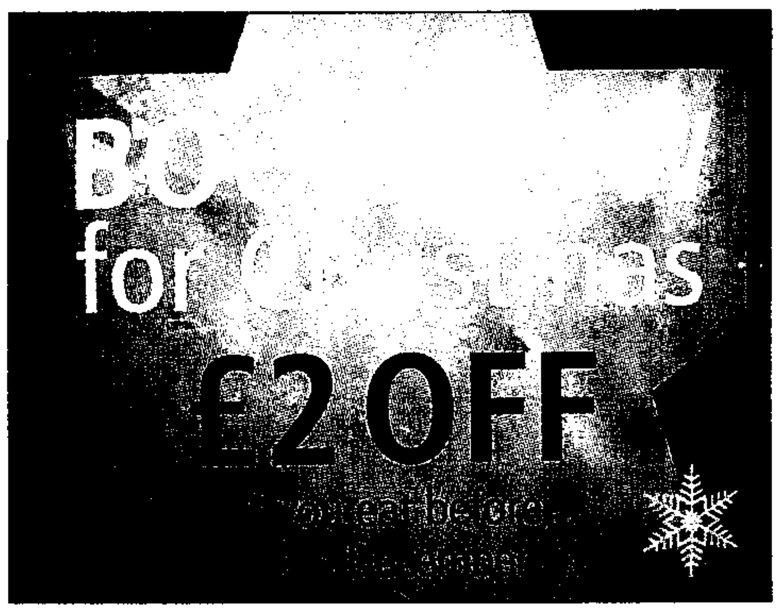
*'Piloti'*

## YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

All those big stars giving so generously of their time and talent to help suffering humanity...
BAND AID 20
DO THEY KNOW IT'S CHRISTMAS?
OUT NOW!
Shame they rejected Damien's cover artwork.
The heartless bastards!

## I-SPY *Watford*




**Submitted by Paul Batute.** £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

## MUSIC & MUSICIANS

**IT'S well known that Customs & Excise officers are zealous in pursuit of easy prey and far less so in their dealings with serious offenders who have platoons of lawyers and accountants. But the enthusiasm with which VAT inspectors are now laying into arts organisations is vicious.**

Matters came to a head last week in VAT proceedings arising from the shameful hounding of the much-admired back-garden industry called Longborough Festival Opera, founded by a country businessman with a bit of money and the mad fantasy of bringing Wagner to the Cotswolds.

Artistically it's been successful. Financially it's been precarious. But like most small-scale opera ventures Longborough was set up as a charitable trust and so enjoyed certain privileges – like exemption from paying VAT on ticket sales.

The rule with charities, though, is that they only get this exemption if they are administered by persons with no "direct interest" in the results of what the charity does: a reasonable provision designed to prevent trustees from making personal profits. As profit is a foreign concept to the world of small-scale opera, you'd think it would cause no problem. But the VATmen think otherwise.

Last year Martin Graham, Longborough's founder, told his fellow trustees he would underwrite any future loss incurred by the festival: a generous offer, happily accepted. But when the VATmen heard about it, they pounced. It represents, they said, a direct interest on the part of Mr Graham. Which means Longborough loses its charitable privileges and "owes" Customs & Excise £60,000 in two-years' backdated VAT.

The result has been a long and expensive legal battle that reached an appeal tribunal last Thursday, adding some £25,000 in lawyers' fees to the £60,000 claim: money an operation like Longborough simply can't afford. Judgment isn't expected for several weeks. But if the tribunal decides for the VATmen, the world will come crashing down around the heads of every second arts organisation in the land. The VAT-vampires already have their teeth into the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. More will follow; and the result will be that a provision designed to protect charities will become their undoing.

Customs is clearly out for blood in its case against Longborough. After a year of wrangling over the profit/loss issue it added -- just a few days before the tribunal-- an entirely unexpected second argument that, despite the endless losses of a small-scale opera company, a man like Graham is somehow "enriched" by his involvement. By taking music into schools, old people's homes and all the ancillary educational projects that companies like Longborough do as a matter of course, presumably.

The absurdity of this suggestion, and the fact that it potentially applies to all arts trustees everywhere, seems not to bother Customs. The arts world has every reason to be worried.

*'Lunchtime O'Boulez'*

# Legal News

**THE investigation launched by the Law Society into complaints that its past president Michael Napier had breached rules governing conflict of interest is recommending "an internal sanction".**

The officer investigating claims that Mr Napier was representing Hong Kong barrister Michael Ford in his case against the multinational Exxon while his firm, Irwin Mitchell, was acting for the Exxon subsidiary, Esso, in an unrelated case has concluded that there was a "potential for conflict and no more".

The investigator added that it did not affect the tenacity with which Mr Napier and his firm pursued Mr Ford's claim. Therefore, he said, while there was "breach of the rule simpliciter, in the circumstances it does not amount to conduct unbefitting".

The report and recommendation will now go to an adjudication panel for a final decision. However, Michael Ford, who claims he was sacked, abused and ruined by his former client, Exxon, after he refused to conceal vital documents from the coroner investigating a fatal explosion in a Hong Kong power station, is far from satisfied.

He has now complained to both the legal services ombudsman and the office for the supervision of solicitors that key witnesses were ignored and that vital documents which he submitted are now missing from the file to be sent to the adjudication panel.

## SOCIAL SERVICES

**BAD news for the West Midlands foster parents and the 14-year-old schoolboy who after six happy years in their care was suddenly removed and placed in an institution by Sandwell social services (see *Eyes passim*).**

All three had hoped to be reunited before Christmas; but Sandwell has now refused to allow the child to accompany the couple to South Africa where they have business interests. Although the couple, held up as model foster parents, travel regularly between Britain and South Africa, they wanted to make South Africa the child's primary address. But a letter last week said that following an "independent" assessment, it was decided the move was not in the teenager's best interest "although we are mindful of the extent of his relationship with you and his stated wish to return to South Africa".

There was apparently concern that his education and health care had been disrupted by his prolonged stay in South Africa last year. But the foster parents say this is nonsense. Often excluded from school in the UK because of his disruptive behaviour, the boy received private tuition in South Africa and the foster parents say he has never, in the six years he has come to call them mum and dad, had or needed any medical treatment for illness or accident.

By contrast, in the weeks after he was removed from their care and placed in a children's home, he tried to strangle himself and was also badly beaten by another child in an incident which involved the police.

"We expect that 'X' and yourselves will be very upset about this outcome," said the social services letter. This is an understatement. The couple are devastated and investigating what legal steps they can take to challenge the decision.

## MMR: OH DEER OH DEER

**THE makers of Channel 4's *MMR: What They Never Told You* in the *Dispatches* strand should perhaps have thought twice before engaging journalist Brian Deer to present a hatchet job on Dr Andrew Wakefield.**

According to Deer, Dr Wakefield, the gastro-enterologist at the centre of the MMR controversy, was little more than a snake oil salesman who led a Royal Free medical school conspiracy to discredit the MMR triple vaccine and make money from a vaccine it was developing itself.

Deer also claimed that when Wakefield voiced his concerns about the triple jab, he had already tested for and failed to find measles in the autistic and gut-diseased children he was treating; and moreover that those children were abused in the name of his flawed research. There were plenty of other allegations thrown into the mix but those are the main ones and certainly the ones over which m'learned friends are currently rubbing their hands.

What Deer failed to point out is that until Wakefield voiced concerns over MMR, he was a high flyer at the forefront of advances in understanding and treating inflammatory bowel diseases. Yet Deer made no mention of Wakefield's previous career or credentials; no mention of the science which preceded the controversial 1998 paper which Deer claims started the MMR scare; no mention of the research since (including that which has found measles virus in the guts, spinal fluid and in one case the brain of an autistic child). Nor was there any acknowledgment that the controversial paper in question – only partially retracted last year – did indeed identify a new disease process in these children's guts.

Deer's personalised documentary follows his allegations earlier this year in the *Sunday Times* that when Dr Wakefield's paper was published, he had not yet declared that he had been become an expert adviser to the children in the UK litigation against the vaccine manufacturers. Although the issue of a conflict of interest was actually raised in the *Lancet* six years ago, its resurfacing in the *Sunday Times* has led to Dr Wakefield and two others from the Royal Free research team now defending the charges in an unprecedented hearing before the general medical council.

Deer's most recent demonisation of Wakefield and his theory was based on the fact that nine months before publication of the 1998 paper, Wakefield and the Royal Free sought to patent a treatment, called Transfer Factor, with a spin-off vaccine and that this had been kept secret until now. The team at the Royal Free were indeed at one stage intending to carry out a treatment trial of a method of boosting immune response to measles virus using cell lymphokines, part of the body's defence mechanism.

In the event this was never pursued by the Royal Free: there was no trial, no treatment, and no vaccine. A patent was, however, granted in 1999. But contrary to Deer's suggestion, Wakefield **did** declare it. The *Eye* has seen a letter he wrote to the *Lancet* in 1999 informing the editor of the patent. The *Lancet* decided not to mention it. The patent is also mentioned on at least three subsequent research papers.

Wakefield voiced general concerns about the combined measles vaccines as early as 1992, many years before the Royal Free patent application was filed in 1997.

Perhaps the most disingenuous part of Deer's programme was that viewers may have been left with the impression that not only was there no reason to believe measles virus present in the Royal Free children's gut at the time the paper was published, but that that is still the case today.

This is untrue on both counts – unless one of the world's leading pathologists, Professor John O'Leary, chair of pathology at Trinity College, Dublin, is seriously in error. Before publication of the 1998 paper, researchers had already found measles virus protein in the gut tissue, although not the virus itself. Further, at the site of the inflammation in the gut there were clusters of cells that are typically seen in chronic virus infection.

On the programme, both of Wakefield's former collaborators told Brian Deer that if the measles virus was there they would have found it. But at the time they shared Wakefield's concerns that the method and equipment (now obsolete) used to detect the virus DNA was not sensitive enough. They put their names to the negative finding research paper which Wakefield himself insisted was published even though it went against his own hypothesis. It concluded: "These results show that either measles virus DNA was not present in the samples or was present below the sensitivity limits known to have been achieved."

And so it proved to be. Shortly afterwards the samples were sent to Prof O'Leary. Using state-of-the-art viral detection methods and equipment, he found measles virus in the guts of children with autism. It has since been found in the spinal fluid and brain. That work does not prove a link with autism, but it should at least raise alarms.

The response has always been that the O'Leary tests have not been replicated; but then other methods have always been used. Only now in the US are researchers seeking to properly replicate the work in what both sides of the debate are looking to as a definitive study. Prof Ian Lipkin, of Columbia University, NY, who is leading the research, is internationally renowned for his work in immunology and viruses.

Deer's allegation that Wakefield "abused" the Royal Free children by subjecting them to invasive procedures might have carried more weight if it had come from parents. But they consented to their children's treatments as part of the ongoing clinical investigation. Those children were being treated for appalling and painful gut disease – many had impacted bowels or persistent diarrhoea. Doctors at the Royal Free were diagnosing and treating, and in many cases alleviating, symptoms. They were not merely using the children for research.

Deer focused exclusively on Wakefield's past and did not consider any of the other relevant science. For example, in the week of his Channel 4 attack, a team from the John Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, looking at brain tissue of autistic patients, found chronic inflammation triggered by an abnormal immune response. Although it was a small study of 11 autistic people who had died, they also found similarly high levels of inflammatory cytokines (messengers that run between cells) in the spinal fluid from six autistic children. The researchers found an immune reaction similar to that found in dementia associated with HIV virus.

These sort of studies suggest Dr Wakefield is not the lone lunatic that Deer would have us believe. Despite allegations to the contrary, *Private Eye* is not anti-vaccine and has never said Dr Wakefield hypothesis is right. We have merely maintained that his work deserves proper investigation and that single jabs, used long before MMR, should be made available as a precautionary measure to keep up herd immunity. That proper investigation is finally taking place in the US; but until Prof Lipkin and others report, the jury is still out.

Interestingly, in *Lancet* editor Richard Horton's book on the MMR controversy, he disclosed how "one of the protagonists in the affair had said openly and publicly that his intention was to 'rub out' Wakefield". The "protagonist" in question? Step forward Brian Deer.

# Letters

Private Eye

## Lookalikes

**Woodcut**

**Boris**

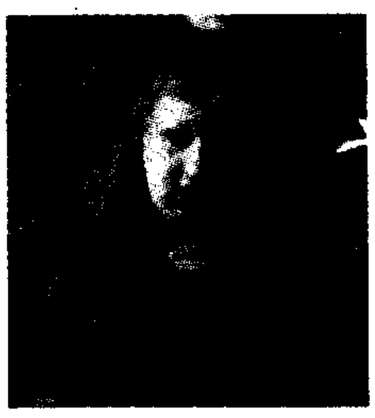
*Sir,*

*On a recent visit to the Royal Academy to see a display of William Nicholson's alphabet woodcuts, I was struck by the resemblance of the illustration of the letter "Y is for Yokel", depicted by a blond, round-faced figure, and the late shadow arts minister, Boris Johnson, and wondered if perhaps the two were related?*

*Yours,*
*ENA B. KOENIG,*

*Via email.*

**Vicky**



**Boris**

*Sir,*

*The blond good looks, the babylike pout, the stuttering, defensive monosyllabics: "No, but, yeah, but, no. Shut up I ain't done nuffin".*

*Could the Spectator's Boris Johnson and TV's Vicky Pollard be related by any chance?*

*Yours,*
*K. CONNOR,*

*Lichfield, Staffs.*

**Berlusconi**

**Johnson**

*Sir,*

*Has anyone noticed the remarkable similarity between that walking advertisement for understated Italian elegance Silvio Berlusconi, and Britain's own menswear maestro, Boris Johnson? Are they by any chance related?*

*Yours,*
*ENA B. ANDANA.*

*Via email.*

## Soames mistake, surely?

*Sir,*

*Re: Soames Watch. Come on, Nicholas Soames MP, a clever chap like you can do a lot better than that. If you are going to get your fag to do you fibbing for you, then at least do try to get your story straight (Letters, 1119).*

*The letter from "Illegible", the secretary of Framlington Investment Management Limited (presumably one E. Cranmer — according to the Stock Exchange year book) claims the company holds "just 1.16 per cent" of the shares in house builder Crest Nicholson.*

*But anyone with a few minutes spare for surfing the internet would discover that, according to the 2004 interim report of Framlington Second Dual Trust plc published just a few months ago, the fund actually holds 2.41 per cent of Crest Nicholson's shares – some 400,000 shares. Indeed, the report proudly points out that it is number five in the company's "top thirty holdings".*

*Look, old chap, you are shadow secretary of state for defence, for heaven's sake – so do buck up!*

*Yours faithfully,*
*RACHEL PITKEATHLEY,*

*London N16.*

## Sound barrier

*Sir,*

*In his piece in the last issue about the Royal Festival Hall and how much symphonic music might be performed there after its redevelopment, Lunchtime O'Boulez didn't cover the major ongoing issue. Why is all this money, a good deal of it public money from the Arts Council and the Heritage Trust, being spent on the Hall in the first place?*

*It may provide a competent acoustic for amplified music (perhaps that's why "multi-cultural rock and pop and rapping schoolchildren in fancy-dress" was all that was on show at the fund-raising breakfast) – but the Hall never has presented a good acoustic for symphonic music and never will, despite its redevelopment. It has always been too large, the wrong shape internally and with the wrong internal finishes. Since it's a listed building, how much of this can be changed?*

*Enthusiasts contributed money for the rebuilding of the much-loved Queen's Hall after it was blitzed in 1941 but the BBC, acting as stakeholder for all this cash, gave it to the LCC for the building of the Festival Hall. What we got there was a second rate hall, of which international musicians have long despaired. Toscanini doubled his strings at the only two concerts he ever gave there, in an attempt to gain some warmth in sound quality. Recordings are not made there – always a giveaway.*

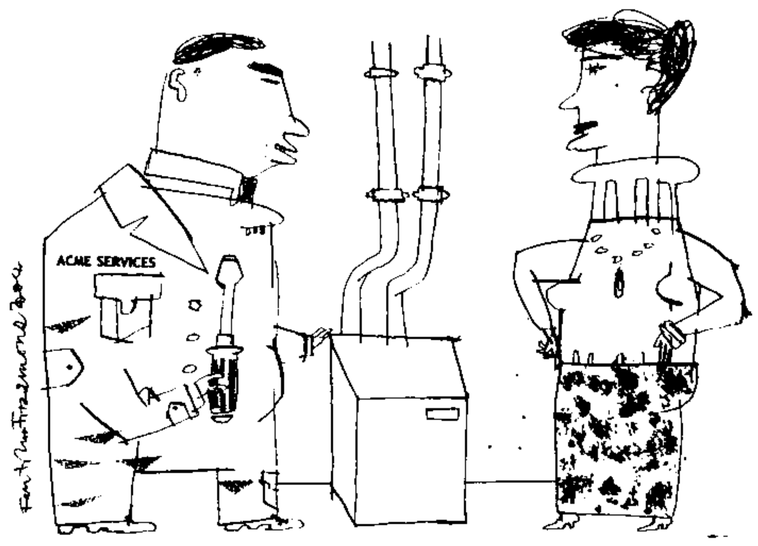
*Lunchtime O'B reports that Vivian Duffield said that we have no hall in London which nearly matches others internationally – we think the best comparisons are Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, or Vienna, or Boston Symphony Hall, or the Bridgewater Hall in Manchester (probably the UK's finest-sounding hall currently). But we're not to get it with this redevelopment. The tragedy is that a new hall at least equalling the best could have been built in London for much less than the £90m to be spent on the Festival Hall.*

*This orchestra is still pursuing this possibility, unfazed by the Arts Council approach of preserving in aspic everything – both halls and orchestras – which existed 60 years ago.*

*DR HAROLD HUGHES,*

*Chairman of Trustees, New Queen's Hall Orchestra.*

## Scenes You Seldom See




*"Well... your previous plumber did a brilliant job"*

## Road rage

*Sir,*

*Re: Signal Failures. I was overjoyed to read that "'New' Labour and its pals in the road lobby are committed to keeping motoring costs static or even reducing them..." This is welcome news indeed to those of us who have filled our emissions-taxed company cars with the most expensive petrol in Europe and driven at 33mph along a straight, wide road past a revenue-raising speed camera. I for one cannot wait for the savings to come rolling in.*

*PETER FARRAGE,*

*Via email.*

*"Christmas is coming, the goose is getting fat, Give us yer pension or we'll smash up yer flat"*

## LUVVIES

**What annoys you most about yourself?**
The fact that I am constantly striving for perfection and my inability to let go of my inner strength.

**ANASTASIA,**
***The Independent Review***

***Submitted by Robert Canning***

Film acting is such a miserable experience. It's so long and boring and so difficult to get right... What you need, above all, is incredible willpower and strength of mind.

**HUGH GRANT,**
***Evening Standard Metro Life***

***Submitted by Matt Lawrence***

*An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.*

The row is not about sex, they said. "Boris certainly pushed it about as far as he could.

*Grauniad*

**One-third of Hispanics said they were born-against Christians and nearly 20 per-cent listed moral values as their top issue, suggesting they have more in common with Republicans than Democrats.**

*The Daily Yomiuri*

## Chorus of disapproval

*Sir,*

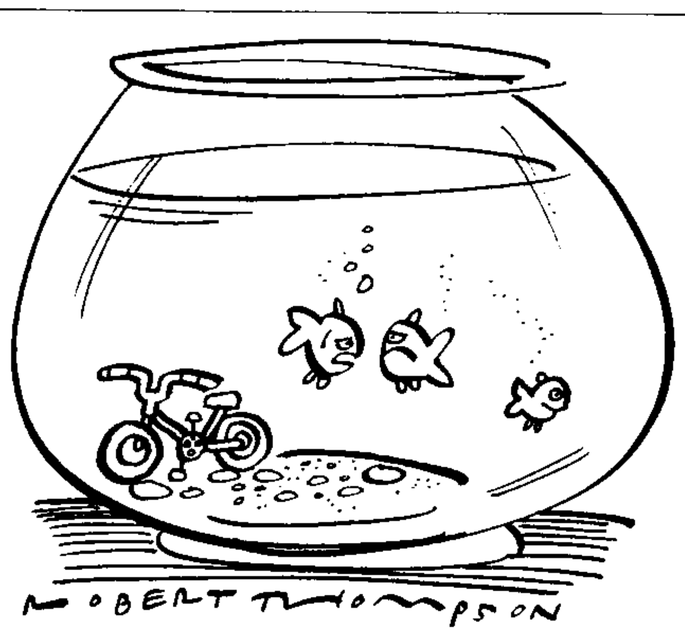
*As someone who's had the pleasure of being on the music staff at the Wexford Opera Festival for some years I'm always happy to see it getting press coverage, but Lunchtime O'Boulez' grasp of what goes on there (Music & Musicians, 1119) isn't quite as accurate as his surname might lead one to hope.*

*1. "The festival went on to programme a production of Mercadante's deeply obscure 'La Vestale'..." Well yes: performing obscure operas is what the Wexford Festival has always done, as you acknowledge in your first paragraph.*

*2. "Since then [2001] Wexford has strengthened its ties with Eastern Europe, flying in whole choruses from towns with complicated names from beyond the Tatras..." Since well before 2001 – 1995, in fact – HALF the festival chorus has been made up of a pre-existing choir, not an uncommon practice in opera festivals, nor an unreasonable one given the time available for staging three operas. As for "towns with complicated names from beyond the Tatras"... it all depends where you're looking from, of course. But the chorus (singular!) we've used every year since 1995 comes from a town with the complicated name of, er... Prague.*

*Regards,*
*JOHN SHEA,*

*London SW20*




*"We're going to have a hell of a job hiding it from him till Christmas"*

## Pontificating

*Sir,*

*Eye may already know this, of course, and be trying to insinuate that Bishop Barbie is not only hilarious and tasteless but also the subject of dumb advertising; but, continuing the grand tradition of a pedants' corner on the Letters page, can I point out that Bishop Barbie can't, strictly speaking, wear Bishops' Regalia? Bishops wear Pontificalia, or Pontificals. I'm sure I read somewhere about some Bishop's Pontificals sweeping along the floor.*

*Very Round the Horne,*
*NICK SWARBRICK,*

*Via email.*

## Dawkins doubts

*Sir,*

*Your reviewer of Richard Dawkin's latest literary fantasy The Ancestor's Tale (Eye 1118) was correct to point out the religious aspects of Dawkin's effusions. Evolutionism is certainly more a faith than a science. There is still no fossil evidence. Recent advances in molecular science have shown the incredible and irreducible complexity of cell structure and programmed information that rules out any evolutionary progression. Evolutionists now cite cell mutations as a possible means of evolution – yet in all mutations studied genetic information is always observed to be lost, ie what we observe taking place is actually the opposite of evolution. Discerning Eye readers not yet taken in by this false religious belief will wish to investigate the following more scientifically-balanced books: Evolution: A Theory In Crisis by Michael Denton or Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution by Michael Behe.*

*GEORGE GORNIAK,*

*Via email.*

## Eye Sky

*Sir,*

*I was recently struck by the similarity between Private Eye, which consistently (and rightly) has a go at Rupert Murdoch's hypocritical rags and TV stations, and another fortnightly publication which recently ran a full page advert for Sky TV (see Eye 1119).*

*Are the two related?*

*Yours etc,*
*PAUL MCINTYRE,*

*Via email.*

## Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

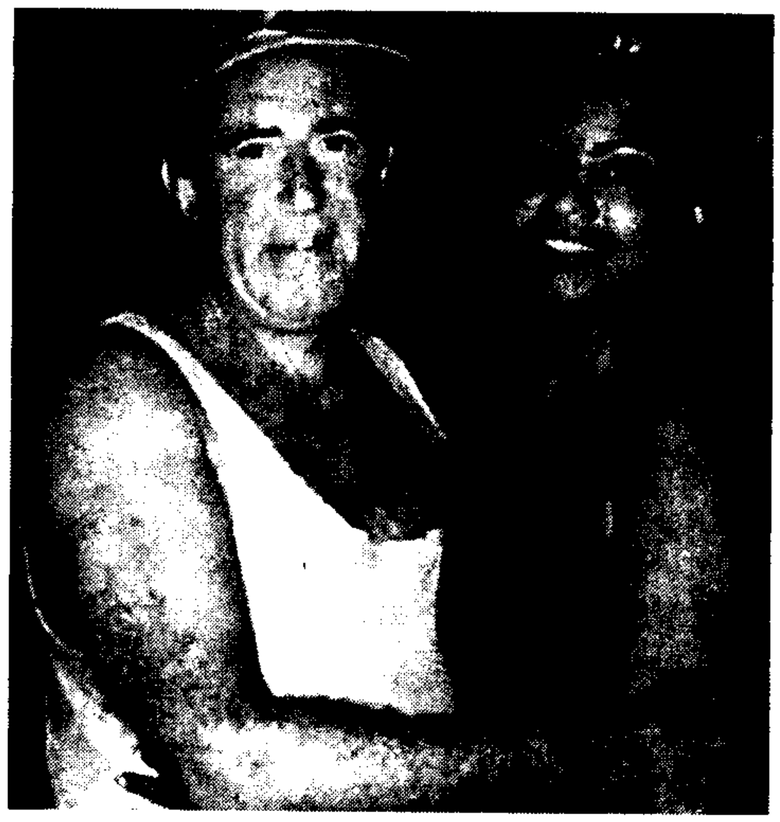
*"The name Bin Laden means only one thing – terror. It also means fear."*
**PHILIP SCHOFIELD, ITV**
(Everyone)

*"One word to describe it would be absolutely pathetic!"*
**ALAN HANSEN, BBC1**
(Joe Lamb)

*"Souness has got rid of his coat and is just in his jacket sleeves."*
**JOHN MURRAY, Radio 5 Live**
(Michael Hampton)

*"This global terrorism is everywhere..."*
**MADONNA, Radio 2**
(Vicky Broadwell)

*"I wish my dear departed dad was here, because he was like a father figure to me."*
**Contestant, Weakest Link, BBC**
(Steve Walton)



## Spectator sport

*Sir,*

*I see that Andrew Neil is to have a large blond under him at the Spectator. I'm slightly surprised, as I seemed to remember he preferred a darker, more petite type. I wonder whether you might have a photograph somewhere to prove that I wasn't imagining it?*

*Yours,*
*KERRY BUCKLEY,*

*Via email.*

*Sir,*

*The newly-appointed chief executive of the Spectator, Andrew Neil, has advised his editor, Boris Johnson, to keep a low public profile for the good of the publication. Would you by any chance have a photo of Mr Neil demonstrating exactly how he used to keep a low profile for the good of the Sunday Times, when he was its editor?*

*Yours etc,*
*CIARÁN NORRIS,*

*Esher, Surrey.*

*Sir,*

*I wonder if, by any chance, you have a suitable photo of Mr Neil kitted out in his usual business attire, so that Mr Johnson can get an inkling as to what the likely dress code will be at the Spectator offices from now on?*

*Yours sincerely,*
*JONATHAN COCKBURN,*

*Hewelsfield, Glos.*

## SOLUTIONS

"Leaders in Fall Risk Solutions" — *safety equipment* **(Kevin Johncock).**

"Progressive Fenestration Solutions" — *replacement windows* **(Kevin Johncock).**

"Japanese Knotweed Solutions" — *weedkilling* **(Liz McInnes).**

"Banner Rail – Railway Solutions" **(Cameron Kerr).**

"Itchen Stationers — Your Total Office Solution" **(Cameron Kerr).**

"Intelligent Solutions. Designed With Functionality. Franke" — *bathroom hardware* **(Judy Camp).**

"Flexible Liquid Transfer Solutions" — *hoses* **(Tony Verity).**

"Daily Fresh Solutions" — *food* **(Tony Verity).**

*All submitted by readers*

## HOM SAP

AUSTIN

## Letter from **San Jose**

*from Our Own Correspondent*

**CHANCES are your image of our sweet little country has been formed by tourist publicity – turtles laying their eggs on the shore, toucans flying through the rain forests, breathless backpackers beholding simmering volcanoes. Unlike any other country in the benighted Central American isthmus, Costa Rica has not had a civil war for generations and we've never had a military strongman. Indeed, it's more than 50 years since we've even had an army. Truly the Switzerland of Central America.**

Sadly the Elysian idyll has become tarnished of late. It is not our glorious flora and fauna alone that attracts our foreign guests. The outskirts of San José are scarred by casinos, which now also puncture the centre of the capital; and we have a flourishing reputation as a world hot-spot for child prostitution. Business-class hotels resort to signs in every room saying "Fly home if you're thinking of having sex with children."

There is evidence that the problem is getting out of hand. Recently an American dentist was imprisoned after a search of his Costa Rican beach-house revealed hundreds of pornographic photographs of under-age girls, many of whom claimed they had been drugged. The authorities are trying to clamp down but they have a long way to go.

Nor is our stable multi-party democracy as democratic as it seems. Our last civil war in 1949 was fought between two classic "strong man" presidents – Rafael Angel Calderon and Jose Figueres. Both their sons went on to become president in the 1990s and both run their parties even when they are not in power – classic Latin American strongmen.

Rafael Angel Calderon Jr is now in jail. His downfall came after the head of the social security system blew the whistle on his role in dividing the spoils from a $39m Finnish loan to help improve healthcare. Although officially out of power, Calderon brokered the deal and then arranged for shares to go to half a dozen cronies. He had his own private company next door in Panama help with the transaction.

Our other ex-president under arrest is Miguel Angel Rodriguez, who left office in 2002 and had managed to win a job as head of the Organization of American States before he was rumbled. He appears to have taken a kickback from the French telecoms company Alcatel, which was bidding for a chunk of Costa Rica's bandwidth. A cheque from Alcatel mysteriously showed up in his wife's bank account in the Cayman Islands.

Then there is José Figueres Jr, Rodriguez's predecessor, who has had to stand down as president of the World Economic Forum, which organises the Davos conferences. He failed to reveal a $965,0000 "consultancy fee".

How could this happen? Our two main parties, the PUSC and the PLC, long ago made a deal that they would go easy on each other in opposition. If there are seven appointees to a public post, the party in government gets four, the opposition gets three. It stops the ugliness and uncertainty that come with transitions elsewhere in Latin America. But it means that to all intents and purposes we have had a one-party system. With a few powerful figures like Calderon and Figueres knowing they would not be brought to account, corruption spread through the body politic.

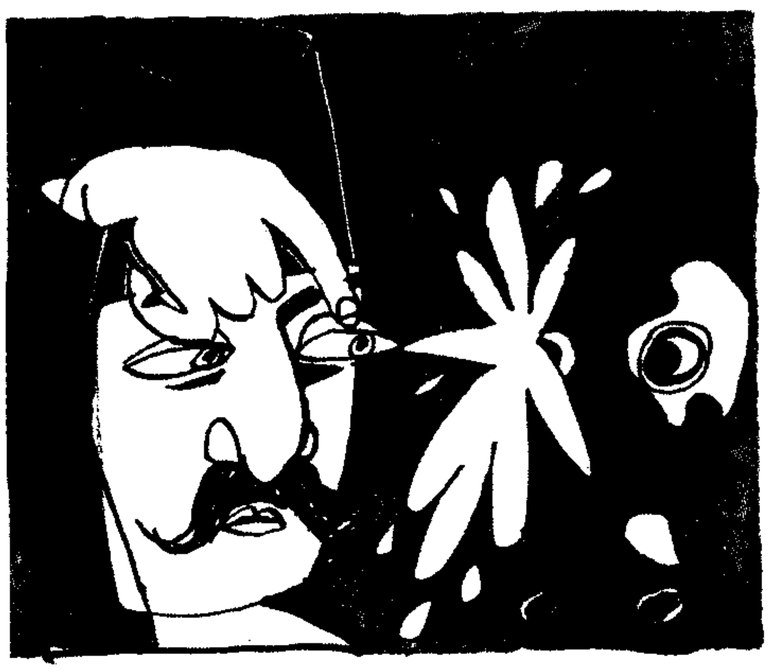
The one good thing is that we Ticos have started to fight back. The whole country rejoiced when Calderon's trip to prison in a Black Maria was broadcast live. And Ticos even resorted to holding street demonstrations – very un-Costa Rican. People were wearing masks and they shouted down our current president, Abel Pacheco.

We might be able to arrest the slide into sleaze if the justice authorities keep on prosecuting everyone responsible for the corruption scandals. They might even be able to fight back against the rising petty crime and prostitution. And we have elections in two years, where with luck we will boot the whole political class out of office. But if not we still have the turtles and toucans.

# FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "I'm happy and proud that I have put Turkey into the record books, even if it's only for milk squirting," Ilker Yilmaz told a crowd in Istanbul, after seizing the world title from Canada. "There are only a handful of talented people around the world who can perform the great feat of snorting milk into the nose, then squirting it out of the eye, because it requires a malformation of the tear glands to do it.



Today's squirt was 9.2 feet, and it has smashed the previous record by almost six inches.

"It was only by chance that I first learned I had such a talent," the twenty-eight-year-old construction worker added. "When I was swimming with friends, I noticed that water was squirting out of my eye. Then I saw a Canadian called Mike Moraal squirting milk on television, and I thought maybe I could do that too. My technique is simple. I suck the milk into my nasal cavity, hold my nose, pull my left eyelid back with my finger, and squirt. It was my third and final attempt that brought me the world record. Finally, I would like to thank my sponsors, the Kay Sut milk company." *(USA Today, 1/9/04. Spotter: A. S. Cox)*

– ● –

● *"Nobody knows the full extent of the problem," Professor Tyler Ochea told a press conference at Santa Clara University in San Francisco, "but a growing number of incidents over the past decade made it clear we urgently needed a bill. Thanks to this new legislation, having sex with corpses is now totally illegal in the state of California, and anyone caught in the act will be committing a felony punishable by up to eight years in prison."*

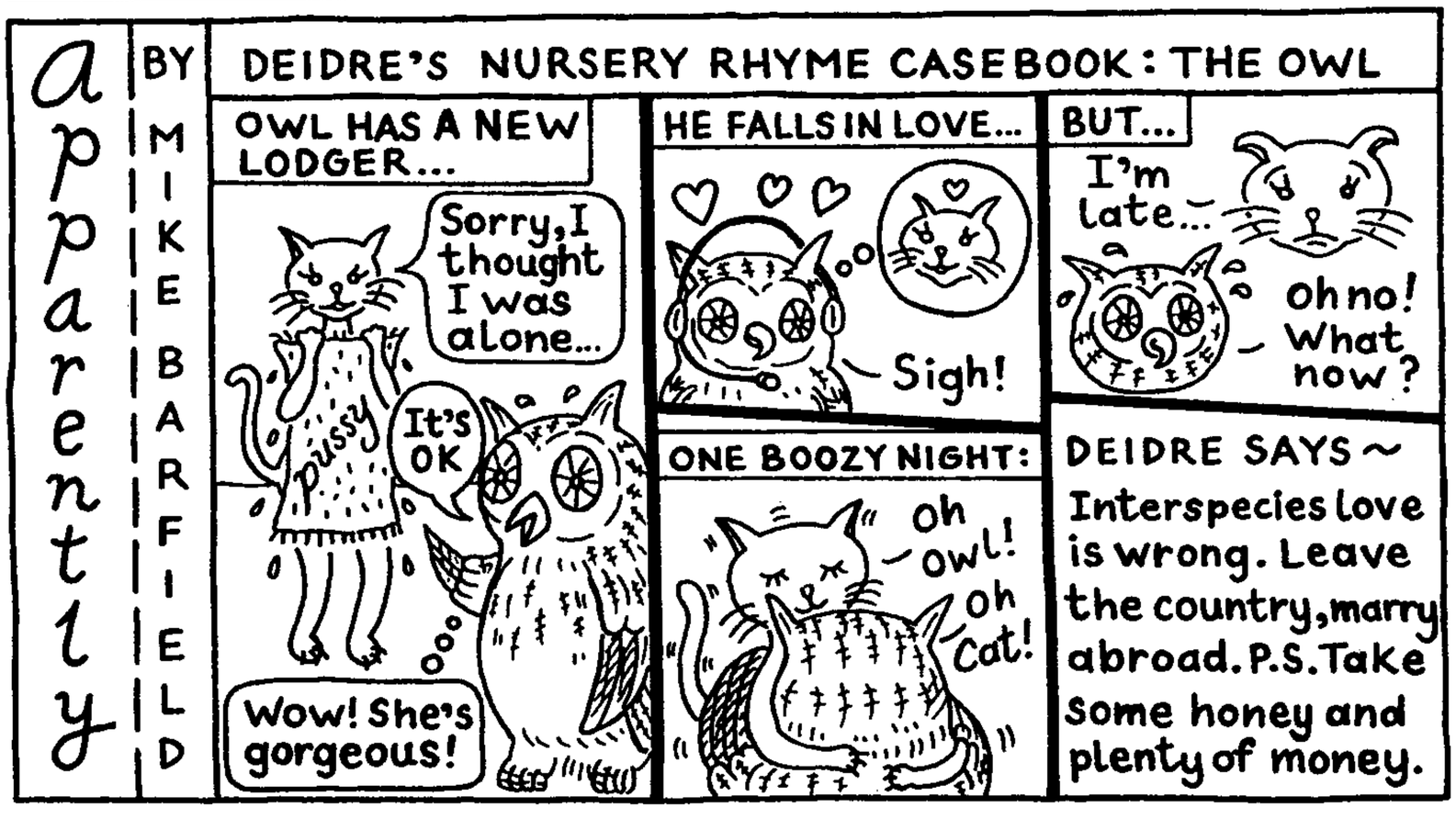
*Professor Ochea (of the university's School of Law) was speaking after Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger had signed a bill, officially outlawing necrophilia in California. "Lawmakers were determined to act after a case last year, when a man broke into the Hogan, Sullivan and Bianco funeral home on Ninth Avenue. He was found with his pants down, having sex with the corpse of an elderly woman, and arrested. But when the case came to court, the District Attorney realised that he couldn't be charged with a felony, because there was nothing in the state legislature forbidding sex with a corpse. Mutilating, yes. Disinterment, yes. But simply having sex, no.*

*"In the end, that man was arraigned on a misdemeanour charge of trespassing, and fined, but there have been other cases involving people who actually worked in mortuaries, who couldn't be charged with anything at all. But with this new legislation, our prosecutors will no longer be stymied by the lack of an official ban on necrophilia."* (San Francisco Examiner, 10/9/04. Spotter: Tony)

– ● –

● "I don't know why we've had so many enquiries this year," Kim Myung Gun of the Sex Volunteer Corps told journalists in Tokyo, "but I suppose it's because a lot of the newspaper stories written about us mentioned that we specialise in virgins. Whatever the reason is, we've had more than forty virgins come to us for help since the start of the year, and what's surprising is that many of them have been married women."

Kim, a lecturer on sexual anthropology at Wako University, was speaking about the women who have contacted his voluntary organisation, which has become famous throughout Japan for offering sexual initiation to females. "They tend to be in their early thirties, and in terms of their looks they're not unattractive. Some of them still live with their parents, and haven't been able to set up independent lives. Their biological clock is ticking, and they're desperate not to miss their chance to become full-blooded women; but they need an ice-breaker, so they come to the SVC because of our good reputation. With married women, what usually happens is that both partners remained virgins until their wedding, then botched the first attempt, and lost the confidence ever to try again. The women are hamstrung, because they don't know how to go about doing it, and neither does the husband. What they need is expert care for the very first time, and that's where we come in." *(Mainichi Daily, 3/9/04. Spotter: Robert Harland)*



# IN THE COURTS

## Galloway v. The Daily Torygraph Day 94

### Before Mr Justice E.D. Cocklecarrot

*(Mr Galloway continued to give evidence under examination from his counsel Sir Ephraim Hugefee Q.C.)*

**Sir Ephraim** *(for it is he)*: Mr Gallowglass, what was your reaction when you read in an editorial in the Daily Telegraph that you had been a traitor to your country and that, in the words of the leader-writer, you should be "strung up", for it was the only language that you understood?

**Mr Gallowtree**: It was like a poisoned arrow piercing my heart. It was like a scimitar slicing through my soul. It was like an Arab dagger penetrating to the very entrails of my being...

**Cocklecarrot**: Yes, I think we've got the general idea.

**Mr Gallopingmajor**: Your Honour, I am but a humble Scottish crofter from the slums of the Gorbals. I have not enjoyed the advantages of an expensive education like your good self. All I have to survive on is this humble onion.

*(Mr Galloway, at this point, took out a vegetable of the type described above and began to weep copiously. Mr Topp-Price Q.C. for the Daily Telegraph then began his cross-examination of the plaintiff.)*

**Mr Topp-Price**: Mr McTraitor, I ask you to look at this photograph of a luxury villa on the Costa Fortune in Portugal. I put it to you, Mr McHaw-Haw, that as a humble MP the only way you could have afforded to purchase such a property was if you were in receipt of several million barrels of oil given to you by your good friend Saddam Husssein.

**Mr Galleyslave**: How dare you, you soft Sassenach bastard. You come outside and I'll break your heed.

**Cocklecarrot**: Please calm down, Mr McLooney. Mr Topp-Price was not accusing you of anti-semitism.

**Mr Galilee**: This is an outrage equivalent to genocide. How dare anyone mention anti-semitism in my presence. I would like to make clear that I have never smoked a cigar in my life, let alone one given to me by the late Chairman Arafat, as you allege.

**Mr Topp-Price** *(producing picture of Mr Galloway smoking large Havana cigar)*: I draw your attention to this photograph of yourself published in the Torygraph under the heading 'Liar, Liar, Your Cigar's On Fire'. How do you account for that, Mr Galway-Bay?

**Mr Galloping-Consumption**: The document is a fake. Any fool can see that. Even to look at it sends a poisoned dart into my bowels, and...

**Cocklecarrot** *(waking up)*: Haven't we had this bit already?

*(After a break for luncheon at the Garrick, Mr Justice Cocklecarrot returned to hear legal arguments on behalf of the Daily Libelgraph.)*

**Sir Price Waterhouse Q.C.**: My Lord, we intend in this case to offer the defence known as *Non Legum Standi*. I refer you to the case of Reynolds v. the Funday Times, where the paper was able to show, successfully, that although what they had printed was patently untrue, the very fact that it had entertained the readers should be regarded as justification and as serving the national interest. I refer, of course, Your Honour, to Q13.VIII.43, a copy of which you will find in your bundle.

**Cocklecarrot**: I am indebted to you, Mr Topp-Price, I see here a number of documents in what appears to be an Arabic script. Do these also have some bearing on this case?

**Mr Topp-Price**: These are the original documents discovered in a shoe box in Baghdad, which prove that Mr Gallowtree was in receipt of billions of barrels of oil from Mr Hussein. Or possibly not.

**Cocklecarrot**: Forgive me, but is that not the whole point of this case?

**Mr Topp-Price**: We submit, My Lord, that it is not, and that with respect, Your Honour, you have failed fully to grasp the principle of *Non Legum Standi*, on which our defence rests. Perhaps I could explain it to you later over a drink at the Garrick.

*(Later a film was shown of Mr Galway-Bay prostrating himself before Saddam Hussein and kissing his shoes, while uttering the words, "I salute you, O noble warrior and ruler of the desert sands.")*

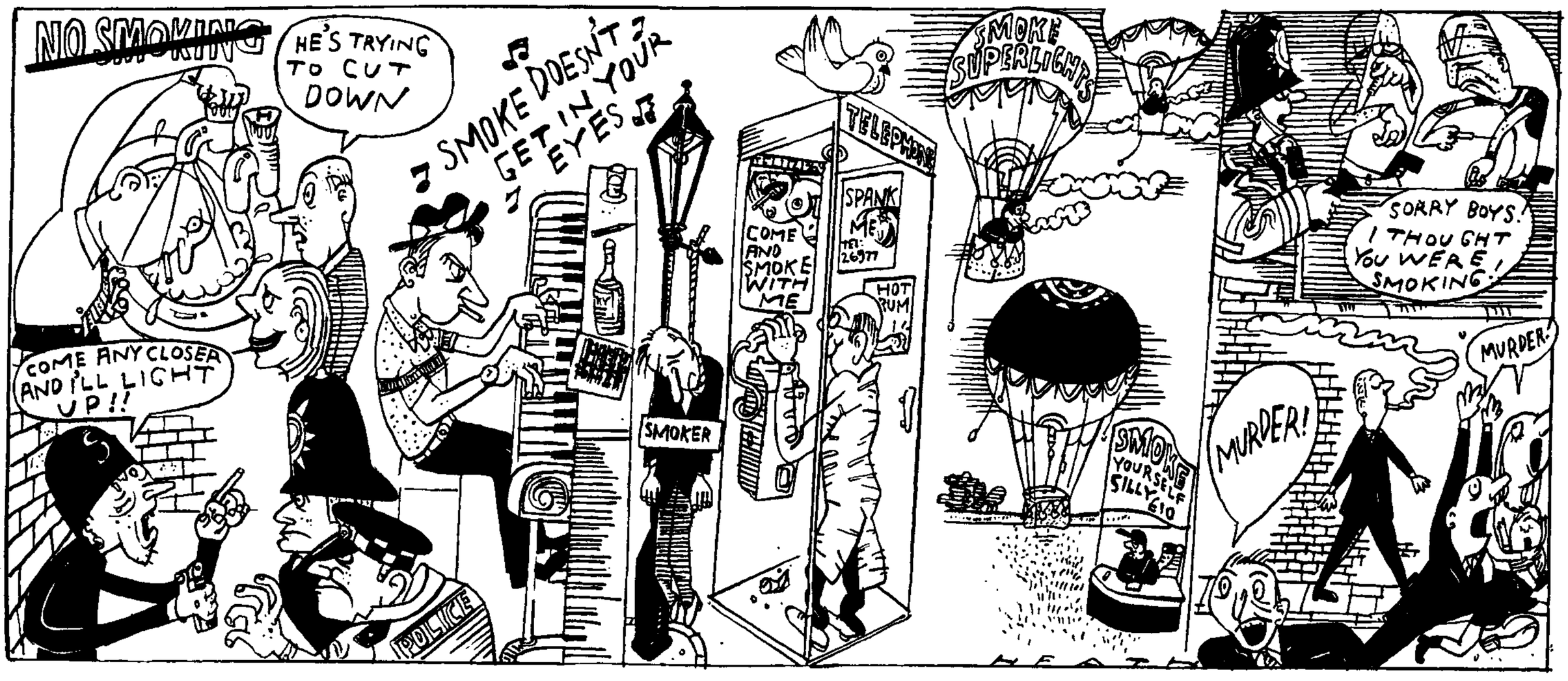
**Mr Topp-Price**: Would you not say, Mr Gorbals, that this video provides irrefutable proof that you were a lickspittle of the late dictator, and a craven apologist for the world's most evil man?

**Mr Galtieri**: This is ridiculous. That video was taken wholly out of context. My words were wrongly translated from the original Scottish. What I actually said was, "You are a ruthless despot, of the type I oppose with every fibre of my being." To see my words twisted in this way strikes a poisoned dagger into the very seat of my soul, it...

**Cocklecarrot**: Do we have to have this again? Can't we call Charles Moore instead? He lives down my way, you know. Seems like a thoroughly decent chap.

*(Counsel then explained that Mr Moore, although the editor of the time, had spent the day in question on the hunting field, leaving the paper in the capable hands of his subordinate, Mr Derbyshire, and that therefore he, Mr Moore, would not be giving evidence in person, owing to an important lunch at the Savoy Grill.)*

*The case continues...*



# ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

*Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)*

Hullo,

And as Christmas gets ever nearer by the day, our thoughts inevitably turn once again to the message of the angels – Peace on earth.

I know some cynical people these days think that it's just a dream. "That's all pie in the sky, vicar", they say to me.

Well, I'm here to tell them something very different! I wonder whether any of the children can tell me who is the Very Important Person I travelled several thousand miles to see last week?

No, it wasn't Father Christmas, Humvee! That's right, Rashid, it was the Rev. Dubya, from the Church of the Latter-Day Morons!

And aren't you proud that your vicar was the very first person in the whole world that the Rev. Dubya wanted to see, after his historic re-anointment by the millions of Morons all over America!

I felt truly humbled as I stood side by side with this great spiritual leader of our time in the famous White House Tabernacle, to hear him say, "I salute Pastor Blair of England-Land as a really straight kind of guy, who is prepared to support our great crusade against the Evil One and stand up for what I believe at all times. Hail to you, steadfast vicar from across the pond!"

I have to say that I was deeply moved to hear these very sincere words from a true man of God!

But I haven't brought this up just to boast about the Rev. Dubya's very kind words about me! No, the really important message he gave to the world, thanks to the advice that I was able to give him during the five minutes when we were alone together, was his determination over the next four years to bring lasting peace to all mankind!

"Look," he told us, "what has happened to the cities of the plain in Iraq-land. Is not Fallujah laid waste with fire and brimstone, even that peace may be brought to all those that dwell therein?"

And now, having solved the problems of Iraq, I was able to persuade the Rev. Dubya to turn his spiritual gaze on the greatest question of all – what are we to do to bring lasting peace to the Holy Land itself?

I shall never forget the moment when the Rev. Dubya turned to me and said, "I give you my solemn pledge, Toby, that when Sister Condy, Brother Rumsfeld and myself are gathered together in prayer in the Tabernacle of the Morons, we will place the Holy Land-land at the very centre of our prayerful agenda."

You couldn't be more decisive than that, could you? And what better proof that the special relationship between Rev. Dubya and myself can bring truly lasting fruits for

all of us!

I would only say that when that great day comes I don't want people saying, "Vicar, it's all thanks to you that the people of the Middle East have learned to live in peace."

No, I want the Rev. Dubya to be given real credit for having had the wisdom to heed my counsel at this historic time!

Someone to whom, I am sorry to say, no credit is due at all is Cardinal Chirac, our French opposite number, who has recently been over in St Albion's, supposedly to mark 100 years of close friendship between our two parishes.

The Cardinal made himself extremely disagreeable, by telling me over tea in my own vicarage that I had wasted my time going to see Rev. Dubya, and that I was making a fool of myself by supporting his ridiculous crusade, which had only made things worse!

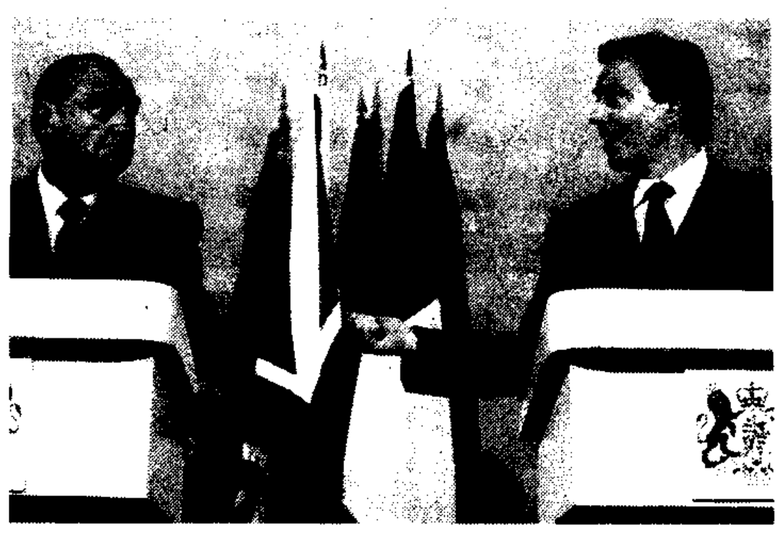
Furthermore he didn't drink his tea, and rudely interrupted our talk by playing on the floor with little Leo, so that he could tell everyone afterwards that he "got more sense out of baby Leo than I did from his father".

I try to like most people, as you know, but I have to say that when the Cardinal left the vicarage, I had to ask Mr Milburn to go round with an air-freshener to get rid of the lingering smell of garlic and over-ripe cheese.

Brother Rumsfeld sometimes overstates his case but when he describes our snooty French friend as a "cheese-eating surrender monkey" I think he may have had a point!

Yours,

Tony



**A special performance of Les Miserables at the Parish Hall was a great success!**

## REMEMBRANCE DAY

There was a very good turnout this year for our annual service of remembrance, to see all the new names which have been added to the war memorial. It was good of Mr Billy Bragg to suggest a more up-to-date version of our traditional hymn, "I vow to thee my country", but sadly his song paid tribute to a number of old-fashioned beliefs which we have long since moved on from – i.e. Socialism.

In the end we used another new version specially written by Mr Bragg's brother Melvyn, in which only one word needed to be changed, replacing "country" with "vicar". **T.B.**

**Gamblers are welcome in the parish but not smokers! As seen by local artist Mr De La Nougerede**

## *Working Men's Club*

Mr Prescott writes: I am glad to say that, following my personal interventing with our GP Dr Reid, the parish-wide smoking ban will not apply to the St Albion's Working Men's Club as previously expectorated. This is to ensure the continued support of the less well-off members of our congregation, who had threatened to boycott our services in protest against what they rightly described as "a bunch of do-gooding middle-class tossers trying to spoil our fun".

Yours fraternally,

***J. Prescott,***
***Hon. Sec. Working Men's Club***

## VIEW FROM ABROAD
### – a message from the former Churchwarden

Is it not time to draw a line and move on from the silly and petulant arguments between members of the P.C.C? I am thinking in particular of the Parish Treasurer Mr. Brown whose bitterness and rancour seem to know no bounds. Just because I pointed out how useless he is at his job (don't mention the deficit anyone or Gordy will have one of his hissy fits!) he seems to have taken it personally. Honestly what an old queen! He really should grow up and try and concentrate on his job rather than making unpleasant remarks about me behind my back. We all know what this is all about don't we? Just because all those years ago I said Tony would make a better vicar than Gordon! Well, we've certainly rattled her cage, haven't we?

For heaven's sake dear, get a life!

Yours,
***Peter Mandelson***
***Rue des Matelots***
***Bruxelles***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**C/O THE VICARAGE**


# ANTI-BLOODSPORT CAMPAIGNERS HAIL HISTORIC VICTORY

by **Robert Fox**

JUBILANT anti-bloodsports campaigners thronged Parliament Square last night to celebrate the end of the traditional sport of opposing the Hunting Bill.

"No longer will we have to witness the sickening spectacle of packs of baying toffs ripping an innocent piece of legislation to bits in broad daylight," said a League Against Cruel Sports spokesman after the Parliament Act was invoked to force the bill on to the statute book.

"This kind of opposition to the government by the second chamber has no place in a mature parliamentary dictatorship."

### Huntin', Fishin' and Shoutin'

Though civil disobedience and legal challenges to the move can't be ruled out, the future looks bleak for those peers for whom opposing the Hunting Bill is part of their traditional way of life. "Many of them will now have to be put down, as you can't keep them as pets," said pro-hunting peer Lady Mallalieu.

# 'GULF WAR SYNDROME' EXISTS

by Our Military Correspondent
**Ann Thrax**

AN independent inquiry led by former Law Lord, Lord Lloyd, has found that Gulf War Syndrome does exist.

"One of the saddest cases of Gulf War Syndrome I saw involved an ordinary president called George Bush," said the inquiry chairman. "So determined was he to avenge his father's humiliation in the first Gulf War, that he decided to invade Iraq all over again, despite the country being no threat to him.

"You only have to look at the illnesses and deaths that have resulted in hundreds of thousands of ordinary Iraqis since that day to realise how debilitating this syndrome can be."

# PRINCE'S NEW CAREER

# PRESIDENT CLINTON MEMORIAL LIBRARY OPENS

*"We're not allowed to put them on real knees any more"*

# Those All-Purpose Boris Columns In Full

## IT'S THE WIFE I FEEL SORRY FOR

by **Philippa Column**

**IT'S THE** wife I feel sorry for. To be publicly humiliated by your husband and to have to read about his infidelity in the papers must be difficult to bear. And the worst thing of all must be the pieces saying "It's the wife I feel sorry for", constantly reminding people that she has been publicly humiliated by her husband and forcing her to read about his infidelity.

Make no mistake, being pitied by newspaper columnists must make you feel completely worthless. As I say, it's the wife I feel sorry for *(cont. p. 94)*

## WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS ABOUT?

by **Phil Space**

WHAT's all the fuss about? OK, so his private life is a bit of a mess. But it's none of our business and the press has no right to go on about it. The fact that he got his mistress pregnant, betrayed his wife and four children and lied to his boss should not be dredged up in the newspapers just to titillate their readers. None of this has any bearing on his ability to carry out his public duties. The love-romps, the abortions, the lies – these should not even merit discussion and are certainly not subjects for prurient press comment.

As I say, "What's all the fuss about?"

**ON OTHER PAGES:** ***'Why Boris should not have been sacked' by David Mellor, Edwina Currie, John Major, Tim Yeo, Cecil Parkinson, "Shagger" Norris, Jeffrey Archer and the late Alan Clark.***

THE SPILL-THE-BEANO
WITH
BORIS THE MENACE
AND PETSY THE PERIL
REMEMBER PETSY - MUM'S THE WORD!
OK - I'LL GET MUMSY TO TELL THE PRESS EVERYTHING!
BIKE SHEDS
CANES
Later, Boris is up before the Beak...
HAVE YOU BEEN LYING, JOHNSON?
CANES
CRIPES, NO SIR! AND MY PANTS ARE NOT ON FIRE!
IT'S THE SACK FOR YOU!!!
OO-ER! THE SACK! I LIKE THE SOUND OF THAT EH, READERS!?
WHACK!
Introducing BULLA the PAD
NEW BROOM
KEEP YOUR MIND ON THE JOB, BORIS!
ON THE JOB? YIKES! THAT'S HOW I GOT INTO TROUBLE BEFORE!!!
ICE

# MAN IN SPECTATOR SCANDAL NOT SACKED

by Our Political Staff **D.N.A. Test**

THE front-bench politician at the centre of the *Spectator* sex scandal was sensationally not sacked last night after revelations about his extra-marital affair.

Mr David Blunkett, the Home Secretary, is rumoured to have twice got his mistress pregnant and is now determined to take responsibility for the children's well-being.

Mr Blunkett is known to have told the truth to his Party leader, Tony Blair, who immediately took no action.

"This sends out a message," said the Prime Minister, "to all those politicians thinking of having affairs and breaking up families. Make no mistake, I shall tolerate this at all costs."

Mrs Kimberley Quinn (formerly Fortier) is 47.

# NEW SHADOW CULTURE MINISTER TAKES OVER

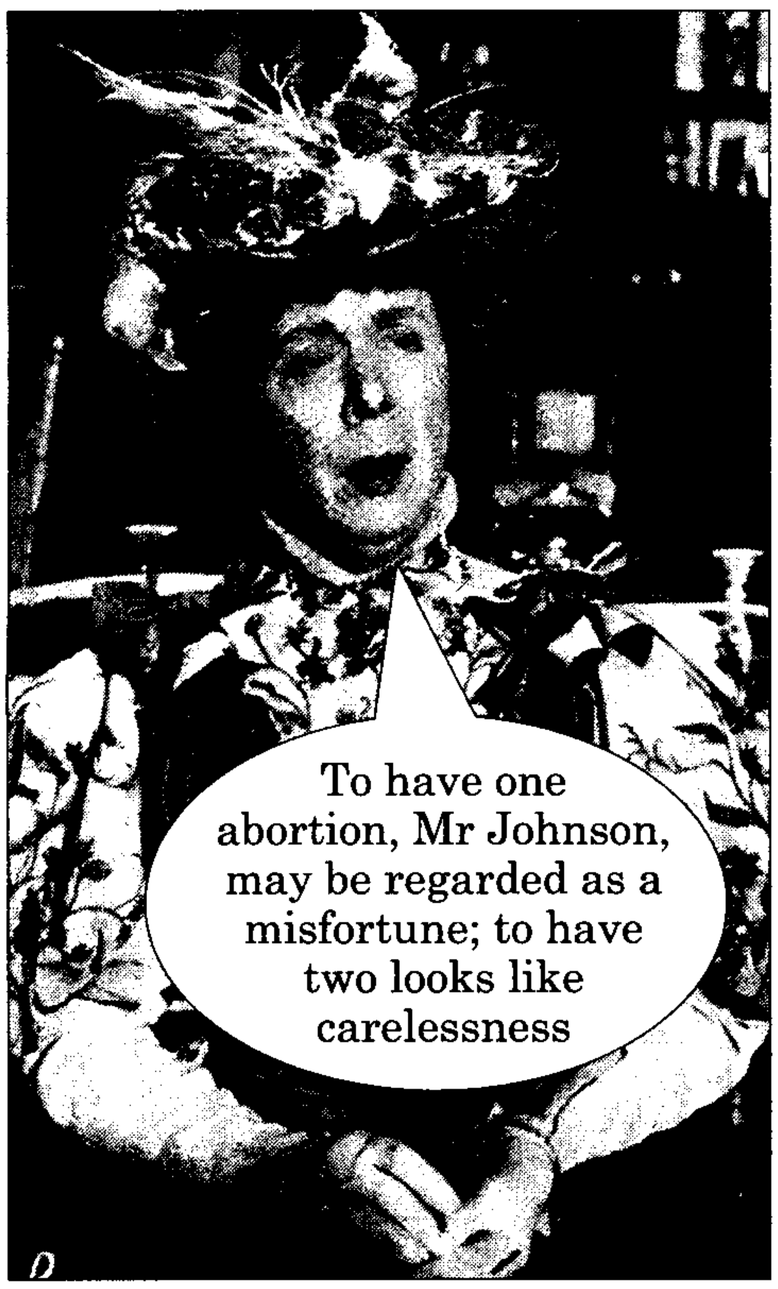
by Our Political Staff **Phil Shoes**

THE Conservative Party have reacted quickly to fill the vacancy left by disgraced Shadow Culture Minister Boris Johnson. They have appointed Hugo Swire to represent "a new face" for Tory arts policy.

"Hugo is a radical departure from the old Tory stereotype," said a spokesman. "You have only to look at his CV to see how different he is from Mr Johnson and how he will bring a new image and new thinking to the Tory front bench.

"Hugo," he continued, "was at Eton and St Andrews, then joined the Grenadier Guards. He is, above all, passionate about fox-hunting."
*(Surely 'the Arts'? Ed.)*

## Great Moments In Comedy




**Lady Wyatt in "The Importance of Being Boris" Act 1, Scene 3**

# Lines Written On The Dismissal As Culture Spokesman To The Conservative Party Of Mr Boris Johnson, MP For Henley-on-Thames

By William Rees-McGonagall

'Twas in the Year Of Our Lord Two Thousand and Four
That the famous Boris Johnson was shown the door.
He who had so proudly sat on the Tory front bench
Now had to step down amid a terrible stench.

Only weeks before this young Etonian fop
Had been tipped to rise to the very top.
With his tousled hair and crumpled suits,
They said he alone could fill Mrs Thatcher's boots.

He was the nation's favourite Tory
Until the gutter press revealed a most unfortunate story.
It turned out that this charming and likeable fella
Had formed an extra-marital liaison with a lady named Petronella.

When the hacks besieged his home to put Boris on the spot,
He rashly told them "Cripes! This is all piffle and rot."
The same story he repeated to his leader, Mr Howard,
Because, to be honest, he was a wee bit of a coward.

As the story exploded, Boris continued to deny it,
But he had reckoned without Petronella's mother, Lady Verushka Wyatt.
Thus it was that the downfall of the editor of the *Spectator*
Was caused by none other than his mistress's mater.

She was only too happy to give the hacks their head
By telling them that Boris had promised her daughter to wed
And, as if that in itself was not enough
He had also got poor Petsy up the duff.

And, to continue with this sordid recitation,
Boris had insisted on a termination.
But when there arose the little matter of the bill,
He exclaimed, "I can't pay that! Perhaps your mother will."

When Michael Howard read this squalid tale,
Recounted over 20 pages of the *Sunday Mail,*
He felt that Boris had taken him for a ride.
"I trusted him," he said, "and the scoundrel lied."

So Howard furiously picked up the phone
And waited as he listened to the ringing tone.
When Boris answered, "Michael, can I ring you back?"
He was told, "No, you can't, Boris - I'm giving you the sack."

"I don't mind how many women you have had,
Nor whether your treatment of them has been appallingly bad.
The one thing I as leader cannot abide
Is that one of my front-bench spokesmen has lied."

For Boris, it was the end of a glittering career
And throughout the nation there was many a tear.
Said Boris, "I've been a chump, and an ass and a twit."
Though the phrase he was looking for was "total *(cont'd p. 94)*

# PRINCE CHARLES IN 'ABOVE STATION' ROW

by Our Royal Staff **Paul Maul**

THE Prince of Wales was plunged into the centre of a major new controversy when an extraordinary memo was revealed, claiming that he was expecting "to be promoted above his capabilities".

The secret memo, which is believed to have come from Her Majesty The Queen, came to light when the Prince protested about his conditions of employment.

An exasperated monarch wrote to her private secretary, Sir Michael Gropetrouser:

*What is wrong with young people nowadays?*

*"They seem to think that, just because they got a few 'O' levels and went to Cambridge, they can lecture us all on how the country should be run. They bang on in their PC way about the environment, GM crops and global warming as if they knew something about it. They even, I gather, imagine that one day they can walk into the highest positions in the land, even though such a job is way beyond their abilities. One really does not know what the world is coming to.*

Signed
H.M. The Queen

**■ Should Charles be sacked, or is the Queen guilty of discriminating against him?**

**Now you too can join the debate at www.sackchazza.com**

# POLL SHOCK BAFFLES TORIES

by Our Political Staff **Peter O'Bore** and **Simon Hefferlump**

TORY Central Office was in a state of shock last night, following a new poll showing that support for the Conservative Party is now below 1 percent.

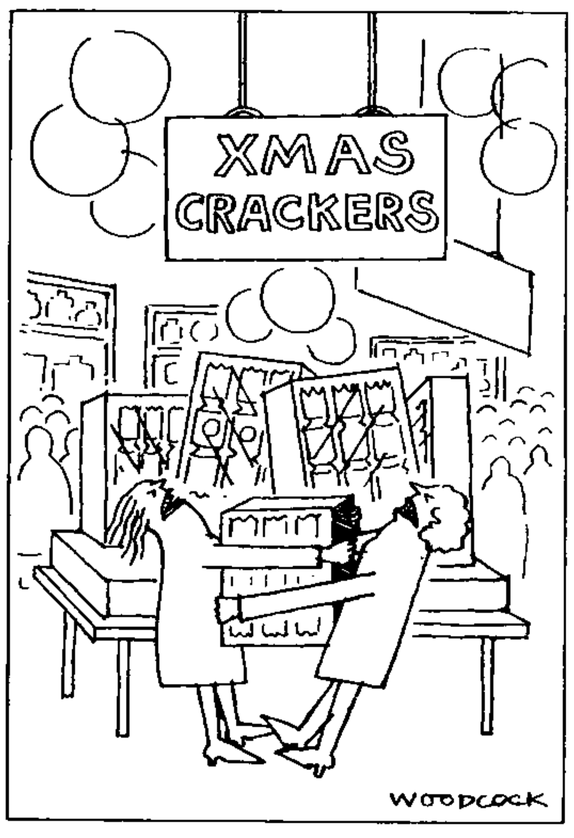
"We simply cannot understand it," said a spokesman. "We've got a tip-top front bench team, with such stars as Tim Yeo, Theresa May, Michael Ancram, Oliver Nitwit and, of course, Boris Johnson – oh, no, he's been sacked.

"And then there are our policies," the spokesman continued. "They are perfectly tailored to appeal to everyone in the country across the board.

"On Iraq, we are both for it and against it. And Europe, we want to be in and we want to be out. On taxes, we want to cut them, but we don't want to cut them.

"What could be clearer than that? Above all, we believe in choice. We believe that voters should be free to make their own choice as to what we stand for. Yet, for some reason, they don't want to vote for us. It's a total mystery."

# IT'S THE NEW BAND AID




## SHOULD CHARLES HAVE A TOP JOB? OR IS HE JUST A PRIVILEGED, ARROGANT, JUG-EARED TWIT WHO WENT TO PUBLIC SCHOOL AND CAMBRIDGE?

MR CHARLES Clark was today at the centre of a row *(cont. p. 94)*

# Gypsies To Take Over Your Daily Mail

by Our Panic Staff
**Terry Fied** and **Al Armist**

IT's the nightmare scenario – and there's no stopping it. Gypsies have moved into the Daily Mail and you can't get rid of them.

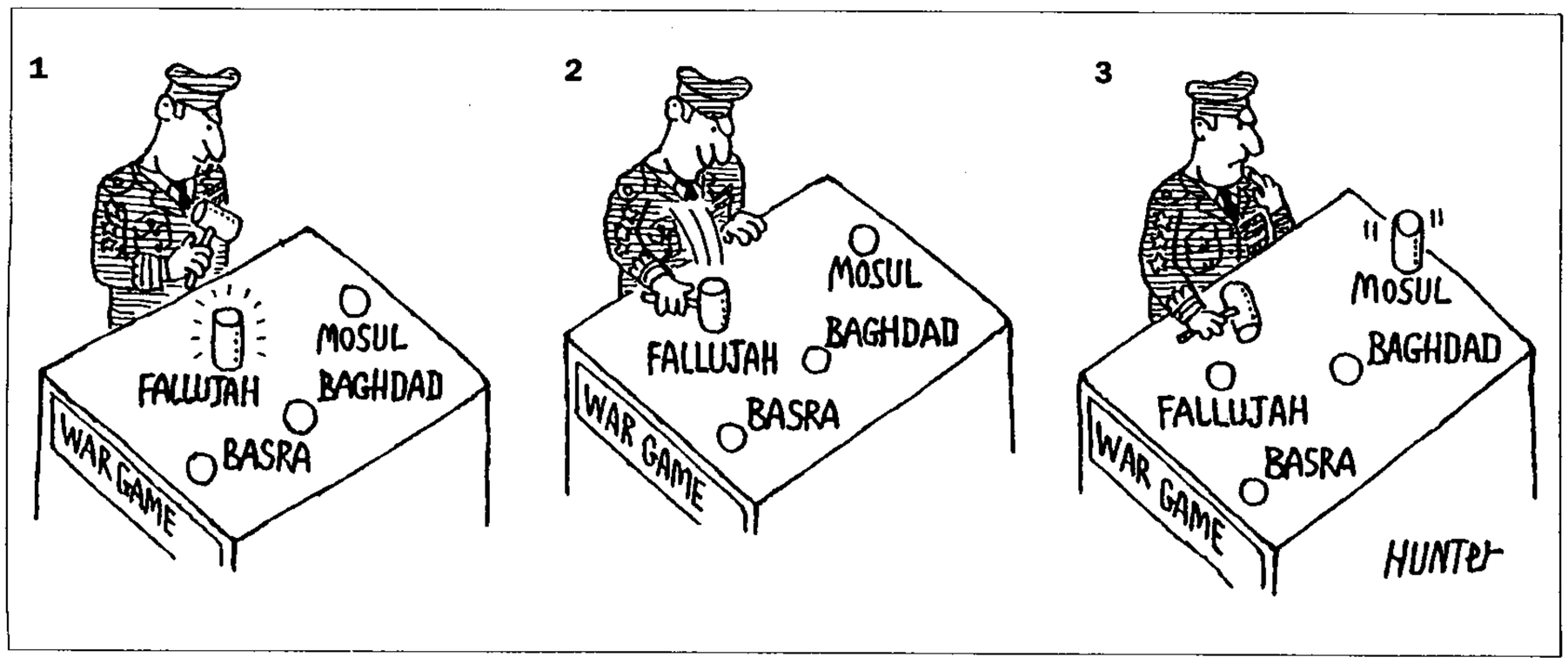
Every day they are taking more and more space and soon experts predict they will have settled on every page of the newspaper, forcing out decent, ordinary stories about immigrants and asylum seekers. Within weeks there will be nothing left in your paper but gypsies and the rubbish that comes with these *(cont. p. 94)*

**On Other Pages ● How these gypsy stories will reduce the value of stories about falling house prices.**

## MIKE MORON
### The Voice Of Football

*Bloody Spanish racists! What a disgrace! They should hang their greasy dago heads in shame for their monkey-chanting at our players. Where do they think they are? Millwall? Tottenham? Or any other ground in England? In one night they have sent the beautiful game back into the dark ages of English football (ie last Saturday!).*

© All newspapers.



# *DIARY* as told to CRAIG BROWN

## BILLY BRAGG'S REVISED BRITISH SONGBOOK

### All Things of Mixed Ability

All things gifted or challenged
All creatures average or small
All things wise but with learning difficulties
The state provides for all.

Each little flower that opens
Each little bird that sings
All shall reap the benefits
Increased taxation brings

The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate
Gordon makes them high or lowly
And redistributes their estate.

### Scarborough Fair

Are you going to Scarborough Fair?
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme;
Remember me to one who lives there
Cos Thatcherism brutally socialised her into a life of inner-city crime.

### Men of Harlech

Hark! I hear the foe advancing
Barbed steeds are proudly prancing
Helmets, in the sunbeams glancing
Glitter through the trees.
Men of Harlech, lie ye dreaming?
See ye not the Nazis beaming,
Hear ye not the Tories scheming,
To impose a wages freeze?

### God Neglect the Queen

God neglect our ordinary Queen
Long neglect our average Queen
God downsize our Queen!
Send her a bill of tax
Put her in T-shirt and slacks
And a range of pac-a-macs
God retire our Queen.

### Don't Dilly-Dally on the Way

My old man said, "Follow the van
And don't dilly-dally on the way!"
Off went the van with the home packed in it
I walked behind with my old cock linnet.
But I dillied and dallied, dallied and dillied,
Was thrown into a detention centre by the Fascist Blunkett,
Denied any kind of basic human rights and had a deportation order slapped on me by the ruthless Blairite junta.

### Clementine

In a cavern, in a canyon,
Excavating for a mine,
Dwelt a miner, forty-niner
And his daughter Clementine.
Oh my darling, oh my darling,
Oh my darling Clementine.
Thou art gone to work in a call-centre
Ever since Thatcher closed your mine.

### Good Ms Wenceslas

Good Ms Wenceslas looked out
On the feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about
Deep, and crisp, and even.
Brightly shone the moon that night
Though the frost was cruel,
When a poor man came in sight
But he was smoking so she
Rightly decided not to jeopardise
The health of herself or her kids
And, following government guidelines,
Double-locked the door on him.

### Swing Low, Sweet Chariot

Swing low, sweet chariot
Comin' for to carry me home.
Swing low, sweet chariot
Comin' for to carry me home.
I looked over Jordan, and what did I see
Comin' for to carry me home?
A pair of surgically enhanced bosoms
That have no place whatsoever in a serious protest song.

● On sale now – *Craig Brown's Imaginary Friends*. Call 0870 750 1712 or order online at www.private-eye.co.uk

# Pseuds Corner

*She says she's a one-man woman – "Although I've always had very good penis karma. I used to say I'd never seen a small one, but recently, maybe I have." She tells it so sweetly. So silly and so wise at the same time.*

**CHRISSY ILEY on PAMELA ANDERSON**
***Sunday Times***

To those who flocked to the 12th-century cathedral, John Peel was as revolutionary as that other national figure whose funeral was being held in Cairo on the same day.

**VALERIE GROVE**
***The Times***

Explain how the operation is relevant to the priorities listed under the same relevance point of the action to the objectives of the programme.

**Question 1.6 (i) of the application form for funding from the EC 'Community Contribution to Actions to Raise Public Awareness of Development Issues'**

Dr Sara Ahmed (Goldsmith's College, University of London)

"QUEER SLANTS AND STRAIGHT ORIENTATIONS"

This paper will re-examine the 'orientation' in sexual orientation and object choice, drawing on phenomenology and queer theory. It explores the spatiality of sexuality and suggests that heteronormativity involves the repetition not just of norms, but also of certain 'directionality' which puts some objects (and not others) into view.

**Forthcoming lecture, Leeds Metropolitan University School of Cultural Studies**

This was not just a match that decided prizes. It also defined eras. It was the footballing equivalent of those big dates in history, like 1789, or 1914. Every kick bore with it the possibility that English football would never quite be the same again.

**SIMON BARNES on Manchester United vs Arsenal, *The Times***

CONTRIBUTORS: D. Williams, Anon, Robert Byrom, Celia Mather, Anon.

**£10 paid for all entries**

Celeb

LIGGER

YOU'VE HAD A LONG AND ILLUSTRIOUS CAREER IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY, GARY...
THANKS FRANK.
A CAREER THAT SPANS AND TRANSCENDS THE DECADES...
UH-HUH...
SO LET'S START BY TALKING ABOUT YOU AND THE SIXTIES...
I'D LOVE TO, FRANK...
WHEN I BLOODY REACH THEM. INTERVIEW OVER! WE AGREED NO QUESTIONS ABOUT MY AGE!

● *"We love Craig Brown... We were crying with laughter."* – Elton John and David Furnish's Shopping Do's and Don'ts in *Time Out*

# Literary Review

## Sheep's clothing

**I Am Charlotte Simmons**
Tom Wolfe
*(Cape, £20)*

THERE was dismay and distaste among the Manhattan literati when Tom Wolfe revealed in late October that he was planning to vote for George W. Bush. To them, this only confirmed how out of touch he was with his literary peers. Unfortunately, when the results came in Wolfe's electoral heresy could also be interpreted as further proof that he understood America rather better than them. These reactions are a microcosm of Wolfe's career.

Having radicalised American non-fiction in the 1960s with *The Kandy-Colored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* and *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* – written in the lurid, cartoony prose that became known as the New Journalism – he then turned to fiction in his mid-50s and revolutionised that as well, although *The Bonfire Of The Vanities* was strictly a throwback: a return to the socially panoramic reported novel of Dickens, Hugo and Dreiser.

The legend – encouraged by Wolfe himself and some populist commentators – is that he wrote, from a standing start, the best American novel of the late 20th century. This isn't quite true – *Bonfire* is no match for John Updike's *Rabbit* quartet or the trilogy that Phillip Roth began with *American Pastoral* – but it was an astonishing fiction debut by any standards and reached a readership that Wolfe's established novel-writing contemporaries could never imagine.

Wolfe had never been a popular figure with his literary rivals. The standard objection to his writing is narcissism: both his dress style (white suits and spats) and writing fashion (capitals, italics and stretched spellings filling the pages, as if he'd never quite got over a school lesson on onomatopoeia) were designed to draw attention to himself. While his contemporary Norman Mailer could hardly be called publicity shy, it was never the norm for Norm to have his photograph plastered on the front of books in the way that became common for Wolfe.

And, not content with counting up his income and column inches from *The Bonfire Of Vanities*, Wolfe published a series of manifestos, arguing that the American novel had failed in its duty to report on the state of the nation and that a reporter's foot-leather was more important than a poetic sensibility in the creation of novels. Updike, Mailer and John Irving all responded angrily, suggesting that Wolfe's stories remained jaunty journalism rather than fiction.

The 11-year gap between *Bonfire* and Wolfe's next book, *A Man In Full* (1998), encouraged his rivals to think that he might be a one-off novelist and the reviews were lukewarm enough to suggest that Wolfe's claims to have saved the American novel were hubris. And, as the writer is 73 and has so far published novels at the rate of one a decade, *I Am Charlotte Simmons* is going to have to pretty much settle the question of whether he can make it up.

It's a sign of Wolfe's almost lunatic self-confidence as a novelist that he should choose, as a septuagenarian, to tell a story largely from the viewpoint of an 18-year-old virgin from North Carolina, who turns up at an Ivy League college in Pennsylvania keen to improve her mind but finds herself surrounded by alcoholic jocks who want her body now that they've been through all the anorexic airheads in her freshman year.

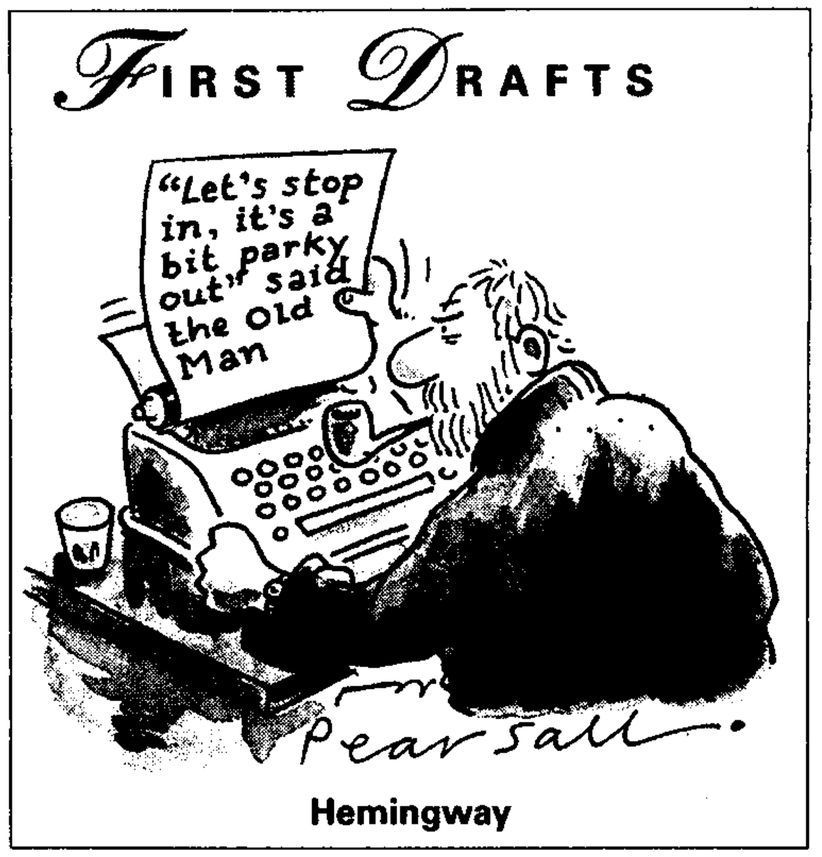
Both the good and bad Wolfe are here. As in his previous two novels, the diligent reporting brings some awesome returns. No conventional fiction-writer could have sat at their desk and invented this density of detail: the intricacies of college basketball, in which bright students are paid as slaves to fake essays for the lunkheads necessary to the team, or the student jargon in which to be "sexiled" is to be locked out of your room all night while your roomie entertains males.

The language, however, becomes less impressive when Wolfe is inventing sentences rather than transcribing them. The linking narratives frequently feel dashed down: "By eight thirty, back in room 516 once more, Charlotte felt as tired as she had ever been in her life. She had been up since three o'clock this morning and on edge the entire time." This is speaking rather than writing and makes you crave a page of Updike.

There's also frequently a feeling that Wolfe's typographical tricks are a parsley garnish on stale meat. One chapter begins with the capitalised word STATIC repeated 16 times, but to no obvious effect, while a nice-ish line about "the deep rumble of a belly laugh" is weakened rather than strengthened by the italicised attempts to reproduce the laugh as: *hegghhhh, hegghhhh*.

And, though Wolfe, America's one Bush-voting novelist, represents himself as a scourge of political correctness, he never dares to treat the working-female heroine of this novel as savagely as he did Sherman McCoy in *The Bonfire Of The Vanities*. Despite some fierce set-pieces – posh parents in a low-rent diner, a summit between the dean and the basketball coach – the novel collapses into folksy sentimentality.

Always better as reporting than story, *I Am Charlotte Simmons* will draw a deep rumble of a belly laugh from Updike, Mailer and Irving.



**Hemingway**

## BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ JOHN HUMPHRYS' new book *Lost for Words: The Meaning and Manipulation of the English Language* promises to expose the way in which "journalists and broadcasters, who should know better, lazily collaborate... in the widespread abuse of the English language". But even the most perfunctory research into some of his claims suggests the *Today* presenter is himself guilty of such crimes.

As well as citing "outwith" as an appalling abuse of English, demanding to know "where did we start with this one and what does it mean" when a quick look in the *OED* would provide the answer (early 13th century; "outside of"), Humphrys claims in all seriousness that the word "pertannually" was replaced in the draft European constitution by the equally meaningless "insubdurience".

Oddly, the treaty contains neither word – or even a "clause 82, paragraph 17, subsection (b)", which is where Humphrys claims they can be found. In fact, the only place where either word has ever appeared is in a *Guardian* sketch by Simon Hoggart last June, in which he spoofed the language of diplomatic documents to demonstrate why "nobody has read that, or any other EU treaty, and nobody ever will!"

■ THE BBC's newsroom may tread extra carefully these days before accusing politicians of lying, but there are no such qualms in its commercial division. The latest catalogue of the BBC's Audiobook Collection lists Bill Clinton's self-narrated autobiography as "abridged fiction".

■ THE first edition of the *Scottish Review of Books* appeared this month, given away free with the *Sunday Herald* and in libraries and bookshops throughout Scotland.

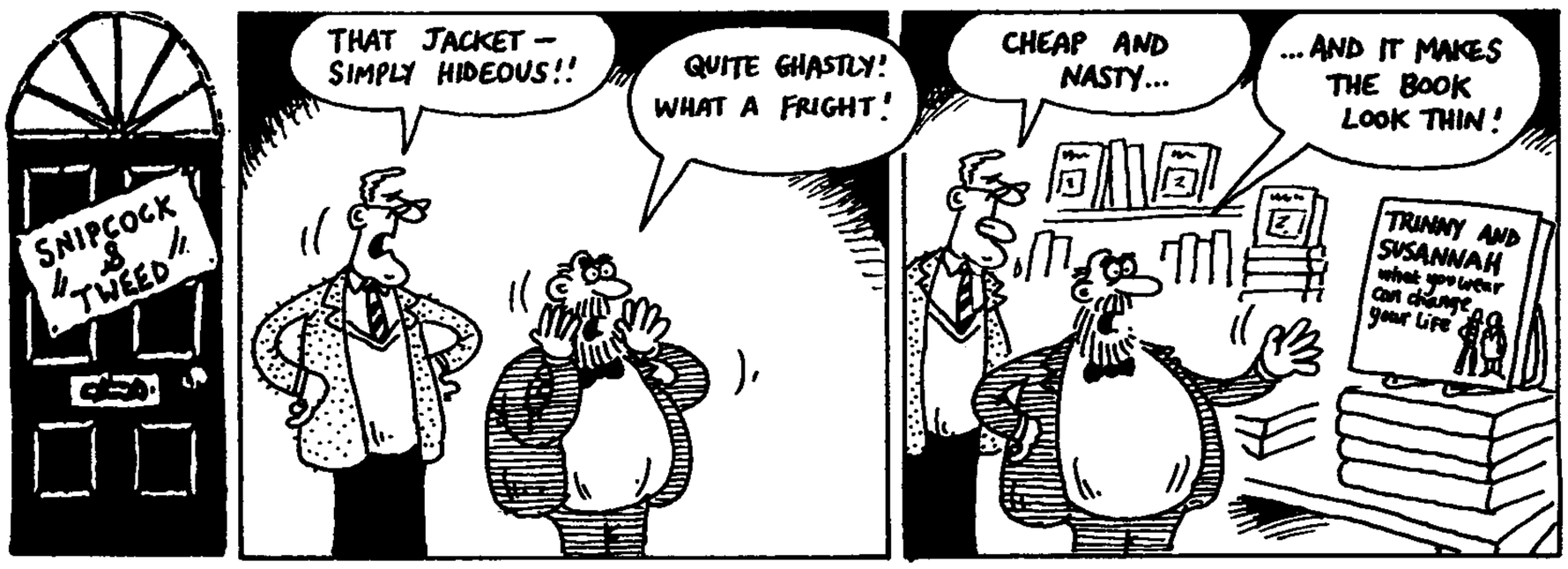
It contains an interview by Jennie Renton with Anne MacLeod about her new novel *The Blue Moon Book*, which Renton claims is full of "absorbing insight and very moving", as well as "gently, firmly subversive".

Some at least of the credit for this must go to MacLeod's editor for Luath Press, one Jennie Renton, but she is far too modest to acknowledge this in her piece – or to mention that the body which supplies the funds to publish the *Scottish Review of Books*, the Scottish Arts Council, also furnished Luath Press with £1,500 last March in order to publish *The Blue Moon Book*.

■ NOTING the absence of Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* from the *Sunday Times* bestsellers list, the *Evening Standard* archly noted on 15 November that "winning the Man Booker Prize is no guarantee of instant success in the bookshops".

Except that, er, it is – at least according to the "London's Best Sellers" list which was carried in the very same edition of the paper and where Hollinghurst's prize winner sat comfortably at number one.

*'Bookworm'*


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
THAT JACKET – SIMPLY HIDEOUS!!
QUITE GHASTLY! WHAT A FRIGHT!
CHEAP AND NASTY...
...AND IT MAKES THE BOOK LOOK THIN!
TRINNY AND SUSANNAH what you wear can change your life

# *Chavs and chav nots*

**Mind the Gap: The New Class Divide in Britain**
Ferdinand Mount
*(Short Books, £14.99)*

BACK in the late 1970s chattering class introspection tended to focus on divisions in the body politic. This was the era of grim-faced warnings of "proto-Communism" (Robert Moss's *The Collapse of Democracy*) or alarmist novels like Julian Fane's *Revolution Island*. Two and a half decades later, with that particular battle decisively won by the forces of free-market liberalism, the angst has veered back in the direction of the socio-cultural fabric.

Hence the vogue for books like Peregrine Worsthorne's defence of the aristocracy, Frank Furedi's *Where Have All The Intellectuals Gone?* and now, pre-eminently, Ferdinand Mount's anatomy of the 21st century class system.

**Lady Chaverley's new lover**

Whatever else may be said of him, Mount – disclaiming baronet, ex-*TLS* editor and author of some woefully under-rated novels – is better qualified to write this kind of thing than most. Back in the early 1980s he figured as one of Mrs Thatcher's policy gurus; and in this august capacity was responsible for writing the 1983 Tory election manifesto. Above *Mind the Gap*, consequently, rises the very faint scent of personal responsibility.

Fortunately Mount is able to prove – to his own satisfaction if not that of the disinterested reader – that, no, it *wasn't* Mrs Thatcher's fault. In fact the blame for the trampling down of the working classes into a flattened mass on top of which a newly prosperous *bourgeoisie* has self-righteously set up camp can be laid squarely at the door of – get this – the welfare state.

According to Mount, the pyramid structure that traditionally symbolises national class arrangements has, over the past 40 years, been steadily inverted. Whereas in the old days, an infinite number of gradations, built quite as much on money as status, led up to a tiny aristo-affluent high point, now the model works the other way round: huge numbers of "Uppers" on top; a smaller mass of the cash-strapped, shaven-headed dispossessed at the bottom. Sneered at by the opinion-forming liberal elite, his institutions (the religion-fuelled "self-help" movement of the Victorian age) destroyed by years of patronising state interference, his patriotism ridiculed, his integrity threatened by lamebrain mass culture, the average Downer inhabits a bedrock cultural redoubt from which no amount of ASBOs or social security hand-outs can ever raise him.

Seductive as this thesis is, it is, alas, achieved by way of misrepresentation and over-statement, and garnished by one or two quite barmy panaceas. For a start, Mount begins by flushing an enormous paper tiger out of the undergrowth – the idea that most people in Britain imagine that they inhabit a classless society. Indeed? Well, he should try standing outside the gates of a south London prep school at opening time.

A long chapter on high-brow attitudes to the workers is undermined by its over-reliance on John Carey's highly skewed polemic *The Intellectuals and the Masses*. Then again, Mount's line on the ability of working-class Victorians to get by without state help – running their own Sunday schools and Friendly Societies and so on – is impossibly roseate. The 1890s, after all, were an age when the children of agricultural workers died of malnutrition, there was still a London mob and large parts of the East End were impenetrable to authority.

The way out? Well, Mount has an idea that if you altered the planning laws Downers could become self-reliant small-holders, which sounds rather like the Prince of Wales in one of his William Morris moods. The problem, which *Mind the Gap* never really gets round to addressing, is that several of the factors working to destroy working-class institutions were in existence centuries before the Industrial Revolution.

Many social historians, for instance, now locate the origins of "individualism" (mobility, self-interest, community break-up, etc) back in the age of Chaucer. Long untended, the particular overgrown garden to which Mount turns his eye needs more than this well-intentioned pruning. On the credit side, this kind of lament might represent the final death rattle of Tory paternalism, but at least its author, unlike most of the modern left-liberal establishment, actually gives the impression of caring about the denizens of the council estate down the road from his agreeable north London residence.

## WHAT YOU'RE GLAD YOU MISSED, No. 94

**Betjeman: The Bonus of Laughter**
Bevis Hillier
*(John Murray, £25)*

ANOTHER preservation campaign which occupied John during 1973 was the pseudo-gothic Town Hall in Chislehurst[75] designed by the famous Victorian architect Sir L. B. Frowster[76]. It was an old Oxford acquaintance Martin Bembury[77] who first alerted him to its possible demolition in a letter dated 15 April. Bembury, whose mother was a distant cousin of Penelope's and who had played squash for Pembroke College, had already enlisted the help of A.G. Motson of the Daily Telegraph[78], Lord Clark, Benjamin Britten and James Lees-Milne[79]. Bembury remembers: "When I called on him at Radnor Walk, he plainly had no idea who I was. But we spent an agreeable hour poring over old volumes of Punch. I remember he especially admired the cartoons of Harry Savage[80]".

Bembury had a further link with John, having once catalogued the library of Lord Felixstowe[81] (nicknamed "Bathplug" by John). Felixstowe was a relation by marriage of John's Marlborough contemporary Simon Dalgleish, now the vicar of Malmesbury, whom John visited in 1982 when he was filming in Wiltshire for the BBC[82]. The parish magazine recorded: "A welcome visitor to our parish last month was the celebrated poet and broadcaster John Benjamin"(sic)[83].

## THE NEOPHILIACS

**"Is straight the new queer? David Beckham and the dialectics of celebrity."** – *M/C Journal.*

"Dogs are the new children." – *New York Post.*

**"Croydon is the new Ibiza."** – Anni Marjoram, adviser to Ken Livingstone, at a travel conference.

"Gilets are the new ponchos." – *Evening Standard.*

**"Irrelevance: the new relevance."** – *Grist* magazine.

"Attack is the new defence." – Rugby feature, *Grauniad.*

**"Ohio is the new Florida."** – Nicky Campbell, Radio 5.

"Gambia – the new Spain." – Ad in Monarch Airlines' magazine.

**"Bath is the new Paris."** – *Bath Chronicle.*

## HIGH PRINCIPALS

**A CHINESE toy company gained £20,000 from a deal to pay-off a director of Grimsby Institute for Further and Higher Education and save the college's relationship with Chinese partners.**

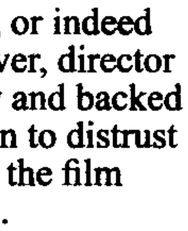
Alan Parkin, director of finance at the Grimsby college, was also a non-executive director of local toy company PH Toys. He quit the firm last year, three months before it went into administration, although his son remained a director. The collapse of PH Toys left money owing to toy producers in China.

A memo to college governors, from their chair Roger McCracken, was leaked to the *Grimsby Evening Telegraph*, saying: "Alan's involvement might adversely impact upon the relationship which was developing between the college and educational establishments in China." The college wouldn't want that – not with a new £1m accommodation development for overseas students, many from China.

While 55-year-old Mr Parkin gets a £33,000 pension-enhancement, the college will help pay off his debts to the Chinese in order to make the problem go away. The people of Grimsby might wonder whether that's a proper use of funds intended for their education.

## AD NAUSEAM

**IT PAINS us to report that Trevor Beattie, the self-styled *enfant terrible* of UK advertising, is facing a distinctly bleak midwinter.**



First, Beattie's great credo – the "idea is king", no matter which medium you put it in – fell a bit flat after his move into film promotion. Beattie was asked to market his friend Matthew Vaughn's feature *Layer Cake*, a savvy gangster flick that looked set for box office success. Beattie came up with two posters, one featuring an iron on a Range Rover's bonnet, and the other the bottom-half of a girl in suspenders. He also wrote the title as *L4YER CAKE*, for no apparent reason.

Bosses at Sony, the film's distributors, were unimpressed. Their research showed that audiences saw no link between the posters and the cinema trailers. The posters also neglected to mention what the film was about, or indeed that it was a film. However, director Vaughn had the final say and backed his buddie, who is known to distrust market research. Result: the film opened poorly in the US.

Following that transatlantic snafu, last week French Connection announced that sales had fallen through the floor. It was widely agreed that its younger customers were tired of Beattie's "FCUK" wheeze which was now plastered across every store and T-shirt. Over the last three months, French Connection's sales have performed particularly badly, down by a fifth. Interestingly, during that time its windows have been adorned with Beattie's L4YER CAKE posters.

Fun though it is to watch a mountebank fall off his rostrum, Beattie's misfires must be of more concern to the government. Come the spring, it will be he and his agency TBWA who will again be expected to mastermind "new" Labour's re-election campaign.

*"Oh Fcuk!"*

# IN THE BACK

THE HOUNDING OF COLIN STAGG

## DUMB BRITTON?

**PAUL BRITTON, the forensic psychologist behind the bungled and "wholly reprehensible" police pursuit of Colin Stagg, might have been expected to keep a low profile once it emerged that, 12 years after the murder of Rachel Nickell on Wimbledon Common, detectives had another suspect in view.**

But Britton has never been one to hide his light – even when involved in an operation so badly botched that it damaged the cause of forensic psychology and the very use of profilers.

Following news that Scotland Yard now suspects Robert Napper, a paranoid schizophrenic detained indefinitely in Broadmoor for the murder of another woman, Samantha Bisset, and her child, Britton (who is said to have inspired the creation of the fictional criminal profiler Fitz in TV's *Cracker*) – popped up nauseatingly in the *Independent on Sunday*.

"Crackers" claims in the paper that he had told police to investigate links between the two murders but that they dismissed any connection. He further alleges that if police had acted on his earlier advice over a string of escalating rapes in London, known as the Green Chain rapes (for which Napper is also apparently now prime suspect), "Samantha Bisset would never have been killed… and if it is the same person, then neither would Rachel Nickell…

"To this day I do not understand why this did not happen. We were looking at an escalating offender. My advice was to look at the case from a local level… I sometime wish I'd gone back and banged on their, the police's, door."

All this is interesting news to Colin Stagg's defence team, which points out that if Britton really did believe there were clues linking the murder of Rachel Nickell to that of Samantha Bisset at the time, the defence team had a right to know. It would have pointed directly to Stagg's innocence. Stagg could not have killed Ms Bisset as he was already in jail awaiting trial for murder when she and her child were killed.

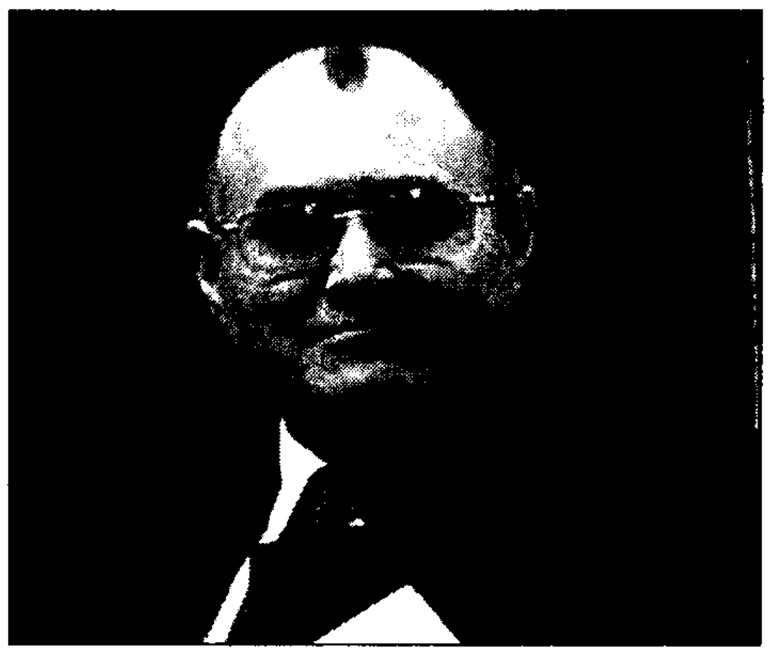
More importantly, according to Jim Sturman QC, who represented Stagg, if Britton did think this at the time, it raises the question of why he did not withdraw or moderate his own "expert" evidence. The entire prosecution case against Stagg rested on Britton's "expertise" and the sting he helped concoct.

Stagg faced trial and the possibility of a life sentence because he allegedly matched the controversial psychological profile of Rachel Nickel's killer that Britton had drawn up. There was nothing else – no forensic evidence, no witness – to link him to the scene.

As Mr Justice Ognall, who threw out the prosecution, found, not only did Stagg not match Britton's sexually deviant profile, but the profile was merely an opinion – and an opinion heavily contested by some of Britton's more cautious contemporaries. Apparently amazed the case had been brought in the first place, he said: "The notion of psychological profiling in any circumstances as proof of identity is redolent of considerable danger." Moreover, he added, the lengths the police went to get Stagg to match up to the notional profile despite the evidence was "deceptive conduct of the grossest kind".

In consultation with Britton, who was "pulling the strings", a police women went undercover posing as Lizzie James, offering Stagg friendship and sex in the hope he would reveal the peculiar sexual traits envisaged in the killer by the profiler – or better still confess. In fact Stagg repeatedly denied involvement throughout the increasingly desperate seven-month sting.

The judge condemned a highly explicit tape



sent to Stagg in which the police officer fantasised about male domination, group sex and the use of a knife to heighten sexual excitement as "the most vivid illustration of shaping the accused's mind…

"I must bear in mind that the policewomen was acting under orders and that the police in turn were being guided by the psychologist; but they cannot excuse their instigation of this sort of stratagem… It betrays not merely an excess of zeal but a substantial attempt to incriminate a suspect by positive and deceptive conduct of the grossest kind."

In the *IOS* article Britton tries to distance himself from the police activities, claiming he questioned the legality of the honeytrap and that he played no part in composing the letters sent to Stagg. "Not only did I not write them, but I did not see them until they had been sent," he claimed.

This does not quite tally with what he wrote in his autobiography, *The Jigsaw Man*, where he says he advised on the "tone and principle behind each outgoing missive and the ways in which each incoming missive could be interpreted or understood". But then in the same book and on the subject of the Green Chain rapist, he wrote: "There was nothing to suggest he was mentally ill in the methodology of the attacks." Which rules out Broadmoor resident Robert Napper, who is now accused of the lot.

MOBILE PHONES

## Who are they kidding?

**WHY are children's organisations apparently so willing to cosy up to the mobile phone companies?**

The official advice from the UK's chief medical officers is still that if children and young people do use mobile phones, "they should be encouraged to use mobile phones for essential purposes only and keep all calls short".

That advice is based on the findings of the Stewart report on mobile phones and health; and when it was first published the Mobile Operators Association pledged on behalf of its members that it would take a precautionary approach and review "marketing strategies and information literature" to stop targeting children.

However, the not-for-profit children's organisation Childnet International, which runs internet safety awareness campaigns, has just run the second Vodafone-sponsored Childnet Challenge, through which children in Belfast and Dublin are encouraged to become… mobile phone pals and work together via phone technology on a project!

Meanwhile UK charity Save the Children has got into bed with the Norwegian mobile phone company Telenor, currently expanding across Europe, to start providing school visits that teach children all about mobile phone use. While the classes aim to give children the skills to avoid text messages from paedophiles, another message is clear: mobile phone companies are plugging their phones to youngsters and using kids' charities to do it.

WATERWORLD

## Pipe bombshell

**"IF THIS pipe bursts or springs a leak, it would be your responsibility to sort it out," reads a letter on Thames Water-headed paper, sent to homeowners last month.**

Having terrified readers with tales of "extremely expensive" repairs to water supply pipes beyond the front door, the letter then offers the peace of mind of a £15.99 a year insurance policy.

But hold on. Didn't Thames Water, along with all the other water companies, pledge to provide free supply pipe repairs at the government's 1997 water summit?

Er, yes, they did – but by 2000 an Ofwat report pointed out that adherence to that promise was "partial, limited and in several cases, reluctant".

Although Thames says it "may be able to provide a one-off free repair (terms and conditions apply)", that 1997 promise now seems to have fallen by the wayside where there's insurance money to be made – and not just in the Thames Water area.

The letters are an advert from Home Service Ltd, an insurance company which has teamed up with numerous water companies over the last couple of years and has ended up before the Advertising Standards Authority on eight occasions for similar letters – all sent with the water companies' backing. Most of the complaints have been upheld, including that the letters have been aggressive and potentially distressing; that they didn't make it clear that many homes were actually *not* responsible for their pipes; and that the use of water company logos misled people as to the importance of the letter.

Although Thames and the other companies are right that most supply pipes are the homeowner's legal responsibility, that doesn't mean they *have* to screw their customers.

A handful of companies, including Severn Trent Water, do still stick to the pledge – only charging for the work if the pipes are below concrete or otherwise hard to get at.

Back in 1996 Labour MP Tony Wright told the Commons that a constituent had been very frightened by a letter from South Staffordshire Water offering dire warnings and an insurance policy.

A whole posse of Labour MPs backed his suggestion for the responsibility for supply pipes to be legally transferred to the water companies, but they have done nothing about it since.

# It's a fix

**ONE of the myths sustaining the private finance initiative is that payments under a lengthy PFI contract are for services provided by a private sector consortium, rather than being largely repayments of the cost of building the new facility. This enables huge future commitments to be kept off the government's books but vastly increases the public sector's annual costs for up to 30 years.**

The problem is particularly acute for NHS trusts with PFI hospitals, a disproportionate number of which find themselves in the red every year as a result.

Things were set to get even tougher for trusts burdened with PFI hospitals when the NHS's "payment by results" regime comes in from April next year. Trusts will be paid for what they do, with the original plans making no allowance for the extra costs carried by those paying for PFI deals.

The potential embarrassment for the government was huge as more NHS trusts with PFIs faced a rapid descent into the financial mire. Thus a quick and quiet fix was needed – and duly arrived last month in a little noticed technical document from the department of health.

The National Tariff 2005/06 explained that support will be provided through the NHS bank (ie taxpayers). This will cover "both support during procurement and build, and, where appropriate, for up to five years post-construction".

Nobody knows what will happen after five years, but yet more hush-hush support for PFI can't be ruled out.

# Unhealthy business

**THE warped logic of the PFI has resulted in an NHS hospital trust having to move into the private health business to raise money to help pay the fees for its private finance initiative.**

Bromley hospitals trust is in the bizarre position of proposing to build a 30-bed ward for private patients at the Princess Royal hospital in Orpington to generate income to cover its costs, which include the near £7.9m it will pay in fees this year to the PFI consortium that built the £155m hospital in 2003.

Trust chief executive John Watkinson has asked his strategic health authority for £4m to build a new private ward which he hopes will generate business worth up to £2m a year. This is needed to help close the gap in the trust's financial deficit of £4.8m, down from £13.5m.

The consortium which built the hospital, Taylor Woodrow and Innisfree, has already "refinanced" the PFI deal to make an extra profit of £43m. Naturally the consortium did not share this windfall with the NHS in Bromley – even though it would have wiped out the trust's debts nearly ten times over.

# Bed Leicester

**PATIENTS' representatives and trade unions in Leicester are alarmed that their local NHS trust has just lopped 327 beds off its planned PFI development.**

Dr Peter Reading, chief executive of the University Hospitals of Leicestershire NHS Trust, announced this month that the £400m PFI would not include an extra 376 beds. The scheme, which covers three local hospitals, will instead provide just 49 more beds. Dr Reading said: "If you look at the volume of beds, it's a reduction; but if you look at the amount of healthcare, there's no reduction at all." This is apparently because new community matrons will look after more people at home and because quicker diagnoses and new medical techniques will mean patients do not have to spend so long in bed.

Dr Reading has lots of experience with the PFI. His previous job was chief executive of the University College London Hospitals Trust (UCLH), where he ran a PFI rebuild which also aimed to decrease bed numbers. After a fierce campaign the bed cuts were dropped.

However, now the new UCLH hospital is open, it turns out the beds are too close together – just 2.7 metres apart. This breaches new regulations aimed at stopping the spread of the MRSA superbug and UCLH facing a court case over the matter. But this is of little consequence for Doctor Reading who is now doing his bit in Leicester.

# Atter boy!

**THE second largest PFI adviser, KPMG, has a new corporate finance director specialising in transport sector PFI deals: Lewis Atter, who until this September was head of the treasury team responsible for government spending on transport.**

He was instrumental in the government's adoption of PFI and PPPs for transport projects, often in the face of evidence that another method would be better – not least in the case of the London Underground PPP.

KPMG, meanwhile, has been a major beneficiary of the government's zeal for PFI in transport and the increased demand for financial advice that private finance deals generate. The firm earned handsome fees as consultant to one of the lucky consortia on the Underground PPP. Clearly no conflict of interest here then – or at least not one that isn't dealt with by the bar imposed on Atter working on British transport projects for a whole three months.

PS: The national audit office (NAO) recently expressed strong reservations about the cost of the Underground PPP. The insurance on the deal was arranged by Marsh & McLennan who, it emerges, have been earning enormous "contingent commissions" in the UK. These arrangements, first unearthed by investigators in the US and now behind the prosecution of Marsh in New York, allegedly result in insurance being placed to suit favoured insurers rather than the customer (who ends up paying over the odds as a result). The practice hasn't been investigated in Britain.



# Hedging your bets

**AS PENSION funds put more and more of their members' money into hedge funds (most of them registered in tax havens), calls are growing for regulation of these high-risk investments.**

To make high returns for investors (and huge fees for their managers), the funds adopt a range of risky strategies, usually amounting to bets on the financial markets.

In the US the securities and exchange commission (SEC) financial watchdog has decided that the risks to investors, often indirectly people saving for retirement, demand that they be properly regulated. But in Britain there is less appetite for action, with the latest plea for hedge funds to be left alone coming from academics at the London School of Economics.

They conclude that regulation would "kill the goose that lays the golden egg" – a view resoundingly endorsed by Sir Howard Davies, director of the LSE and, until recently, chairman of Britain's financial regulator, the financial services authority (FSA).

Sir Howard's other highly-remunerated position, which he mysteriously neglected to mention when backing the report, is as a director of American investment bank Morgan Stanley.

In recent years hedge funds have become increasingly important to such banks as the funds buy and sell shares and bonds much more frequently than traditional pension funds. So crucial have hedge funds become in the City that the banks have set up "prime brokerage" businesses to service them, making multi-million pound profits in the process. The most active prime brokerage in London, with around 30 percent of the market, is run by, er, Morgan Stanley. Not far behind is Credit Suisse First Boston, former employer of Hector Sants, the man now at the FSA who will make the decision on hedge fund regulation and who is even considering allowing sales to the general public.

The chances of any regulation in Britain look slight, allowing the riskiest and most expensive of all investment funds to carry on pretty much as they please.

# Unholy Alliance

**THE big insurance companies that ripped off millions of pensions and endowment savers face a tricky problem: pay policy-holders the money they promised (too expensive) or cut benefits drastically and face complaints for years (too much bad publicity).**

One man's problem, however, is another's business opportunity; and an enterprising chap in the insurance industry called Clive Cowdery saw his chance. With the help of some well-placed contacts in the city he set up a company called Resolution, which aims to buy failed funds that are closed to new members but will have to pay the poor saps locked into them for decades to come.

Resolution's first success was the purchase last month of an £850m closed fund from Royal and Sun Alliance (RSA). The fund has 1.5 million policyholders, many of whom were mis-sold endowment policies by RSA in a scandal which saw the firm fined £950,000 last year by the financial services authority.

Naturally, customers who bought RSA policies have no say in their transfer to a new company and would face swingeing penalties if they terminated them. And those already screwed once by RSA may not have been comforted by Resolution's assurance that it would be "business as usual".

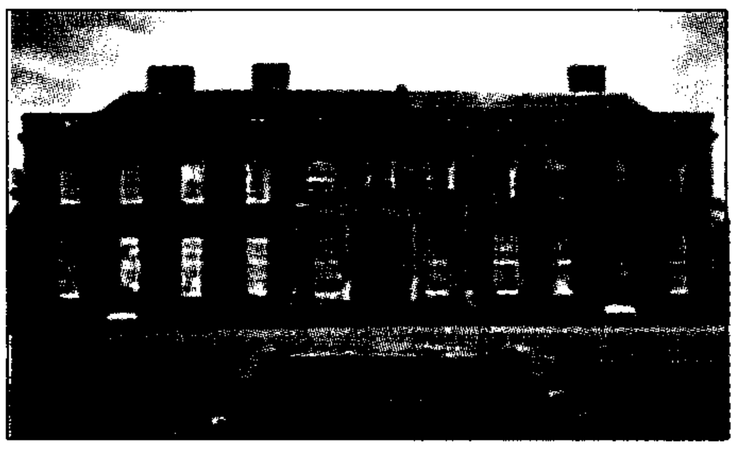
Although Resolution predicts it will run the funds more efficiently, the company promises no improvements in benefits to policyholders, and the discounted price it paid RSA already allows it to guarantee returns to its backers that are beyond the dreams of the policyholders. Mr Cowdery's own stake in the business was reported last month by the *Sunday Times* to have rocketed in value to between £20m and £40m. Policyholders taking their complaints to Resolution, meanwhile, face the prospect of being told "not our problem". If they go to RSA the answer will be "not our policy any more".

Earlier this year parliament's treasury select committee conducted an optimistic inquiry entitled "restoring confidence in the long-term savings industry", before which Resolution outlined what it offered the industry. In particular, it enabled mis-sellers like RSA to "simplify their business and liberate their brand from any continuing negative perceptions surrounding an historic part of their activities." In other words, cut and run.

# In the City

IT IS not every day that the shareholders of a public company find themselves voting to sell the chairman back his family home. Some might say in these days of all-important corporate governance: quite right too! Yet that is exactly the bizarre position shareholders in mining minnow El Oro and Exploration will find themselves in later this month.

An extraordinary general meeting on 29 November has to approve a scheme of arrangement whereby the £50m investment company will effectively sell to chairman Robin Parish the home which he has lived in since 1999 and which his mother, also a former director, has lived in since at least 1957 as the company's tenant. It was initially bought by the chairman's colourful father and predecessor as chairman, war hero Major Michael Woodbine Parish.



But this is not just any company chairman's home. This is Walcot Hall, a renowned Georgian stately home in Shropshire, the former home of none other than Clive of India, whose family lived there for 170 years. The pile sits amid 30 acres of garden with a mile long lake frontage and enjoys a "spectacular setting" among Shropshire's rolling hills, providing as it tells would-be visitors, the experience of "what it is like to live on a country estate" where the "daily stresses of modern life are excluded".

There are no fewer than 19 bedrooms which can sleep 50 guests as well as an 80ft-long ballroom big enough for 200 revellers. There are eight separate apartments which are available for rent.

So how much does it cost the El Oro chairman, whose family has run the company for decades, to enjoy this company-owned asset? Why a mere £2,040 a year! Oh, and his sister also lives there. She pays slightly more at £4,850 a year. But their mother, the Hon Mrs E.C. "Billa" Woodbine Parish, has a protected tenancy agreement which means she has to pay the company just £7,580 a year to live there.

These bargain rents can be compared with what it costs hoi polloi to rent an apartment for a wedding or other private event. The apartments run at £140 to £800 for a weekend or £220 to £1,330 for a week. Some bargain for the Parish family!

Walcot Hall is open to the public twice a year or by appointment – a fact which perhaps mitigates the otherwise potentially expensive benefit in kind tax liability for the chairman which considers any rent below the market rate to be a loan.

The bargain appears to be continuing with the terms under which El Oro is selling Walcot Hall to its chairman. The property is owned by a subsidiary, Danby Registrars, which is being acquired by Parish through a new company, Perceval, for an effective £3.225m. Not in cash but in return for Parish cancelling a block of his El Oro shares. The Parish family are big shareholders.

As part of this deal Walcot Hall is being valued at £3.1m. But that valuation is heavily influenced by the presence of a protected tenant, the chairman's mother. Lack of vacant possession undoubtedly depresses the value. That said, Walcot Hall was revalued upwards from £2.1m to £3.1m only in January this year.

There is also said to be a need for extensive modernisation and redecoration, as well as a latent asbestos removal problem. All of which persuaded the three independent El Oro directors and their advisers at accountants BBDO Stoy Hayward to agree that a better price would be obtained from the chairman than from marketing the stately home to an unconnected third party. Especially, shareholders are told, when prices for such a "trophy asset" are weakening and any buyer might just want the house and not the loss-making businesses, also in Danby.

But how do they know if the market was never tested? And what happens to the value as and when the chairman's mother sadly dies and there is no longer a protected tenant? Surely the value then would be much more than £3.1m? Should Walcot Hall be sold, will El Oro benefit from any subsequent profit on sale?

Danby also owns the El Oro headquarters in Knightsbridge. This freehold was valued in January this year at £750,000. The Parish family paid a whopping £1,974 last year to cover accommodation costs for the use of that prime location. The Knightsbridge property would not appear to be part of the latest deal. However, certainly included is a one-fifth share of a City property last valued at £700,000.

Last year El Oro merged with Exploration. Both mining investment companies had originally been taken over as shells more than 50 years ago by Robin Parish's father, who died in 1994. Until last year's merger Danby was only 25 percent owned by each of El Oro and Exploration; so it was only accounted for as an associated company. For 2003 Danby records that the Walcot Hall estate lost £158,000. A factor in part of the cut-price rent paid by the El Oro chairman and his sister.

The merger may explain why only now are shareholders told that owning the chairman's home is "incompatible" with the core business and "unsatisfactory and indeed unacceptable in the view of investors and potential investors". Even the chairman has felt "for some time" that "it was not appropriate for the company to own the Parish family home". How very true! Especially as Danby has lost money for the past five years and does such additional non-public company activities as making a £70,000 unsecured loan to the chairman's sister!

Better late than never, this is said to be "a long overdue resolution to an unsatisfactory situation". But it may not be being corrected in a way that is entirely in the best interests of the non-Parish family shareholders.

BANKING experts wonder how tough new money-laundering rules will impact upon the millions donated every year, much of it in cash, by British followers of the Aga Khan.

There are estimated to be at least 11,000 Ismaili Muslims in Britain who donate as much as £12m a year to their spiritual leader. These tithes help finance the Aga Khan's international good works through his foundation which is based in Geneva.

Transfers are said to be made via banks such as Standard Chartered and Lloyds. Doubtless this is all handled in accordance with the highest "know your customer" standards by all those banks involved. And the Aga Khan himself would not want an unwitting repeat of the previous embarrassing problems in Canada and the US which saw his followers charged with money-laundering or smuggling over their handling of large cash sums being moved internationally.

A 1990 case in Texas involving $10m was triggered by a tip-off from British Customs that an Ismaili courier was bringing large amounts of cash into the UK. In 1989 Canadian Customs stopped another Ismaili with $1m hidden in a tyre. Six years later the Aga Khan waived any claim to the $1m. American law requires any cash deposit of more than $10,000 to be reported. Similar laws are now in force in Britain. Doubtless all donations are handled in accordance with these new British rules.

"LET'S just say that you would not be wrong in assuming that I will take a big interest in the bill," Planet Hollywood founder Robert Earl told the *Financial Times* (20 November) when asked about Labour plan's to open up casino gambling to the masses.

Earl is unlikely to face too much opposition if he wants to express that interest to Labour ministers or even the prime minister. For in casinospeak Earl holds a £1m marker on "new" Labour. It comes from the donation he gave in 1997 which enabled the party to repay Bernie Ecclestone his tainted million-pound donation.

Next month Earl will open a new Mayfair private members casino, Fifty, in partnership with London Clubs International. Last year Earl led a group which took the Aladdin casino in Las Vegas off LCI hands after it almost sank the company. By an amazing coincidence the Aladdin hosted a fact-finding visit to the world casino gambling capital by a group of Labour ministers and officials, including from the Dear Leader's office.

Labour has had to curb its Las Vegas enthusiasm in the face of political and media opposition. Earl will not doubt be keen to see there are no further restrictions.

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG

MANUFACTURING IS FINISHED IN THIS COUNTRY— NOBODY MAKES ANYTHING ANY MORE.
COMING SOON! MEGAMALL SHOPPING EXPE...INCE
RUBBISH! I MADE THREE MILLION LAST YEAR...
YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN. NOBODY GETS THEIR HANDS DIRTY
NO? HOW ELSE D'YOU THINK I MADE MY THREE MILLION!
179.

# Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

## "Bring back Bruce Forsyth"?

Shares in furniture chain Courts...

...since they sacked Bruce as their frontman in 1998

+ 123%

...in the previous six years

– 89%

THE French authorities have joined the Americans in asking the Serious Farce Office to assist their investigations into the up to $176m paid over seven years from 1995 as suspected bribes for natural gas plant contracts in Nigeria worth more than $5bn awarded to a consortium including Halliburton, the company run until 2000 by US vice-president Dick Cheney.

A UK subsidiary M.W. Kellogg was a member of the consortium with French, Italian and Japanese companies. Halliburton acquired the Kellogg parent company in 1998.

The suspect payments were routed through companies in Gibraltar and Madeira and bank accounts in Switzerland assisted by little known north London lawyer Jeffrey Tesler. Tesler had been linked with powerful figures in Nigeria since the early 1980s. Criminal investigations were launched first in France last year and this year by the US into allegations of bribery. The contract was awarded during the Abacha era when the military ruler and his friends were robbing Nigeria big time.

First the French and more recently the Americans have requested that the SFO provide assistance by obtaining evidence and statements. Tesler has already been questioned by the French investigating magistrate. Now he is expected to be quizzed by the SFO.

ABBEY National's former chief executive Luqman Arnold and chief operating officer Stephen Hester are both looking forward to big pay-offs from the takeover by Spain's Banco Santander. Arnold could make as much as £5.1m through his share options and a golden goodbye while Hester is expected to make £2.1m on his options.

However, neither man is likely to be looking forward to the inquest into the death of former Abbey IT executive Richard Chang, who seemingly committed suicide at the bank's headquarters in July less than an hour after being questioned about an anonymous letter sent to Arnold which made allegations of corruption or cronyism regarding IT contracts. The inquest is expected to take place in July next year. Scotland Yard is still investigating the circumstances surrounding Chang's death.

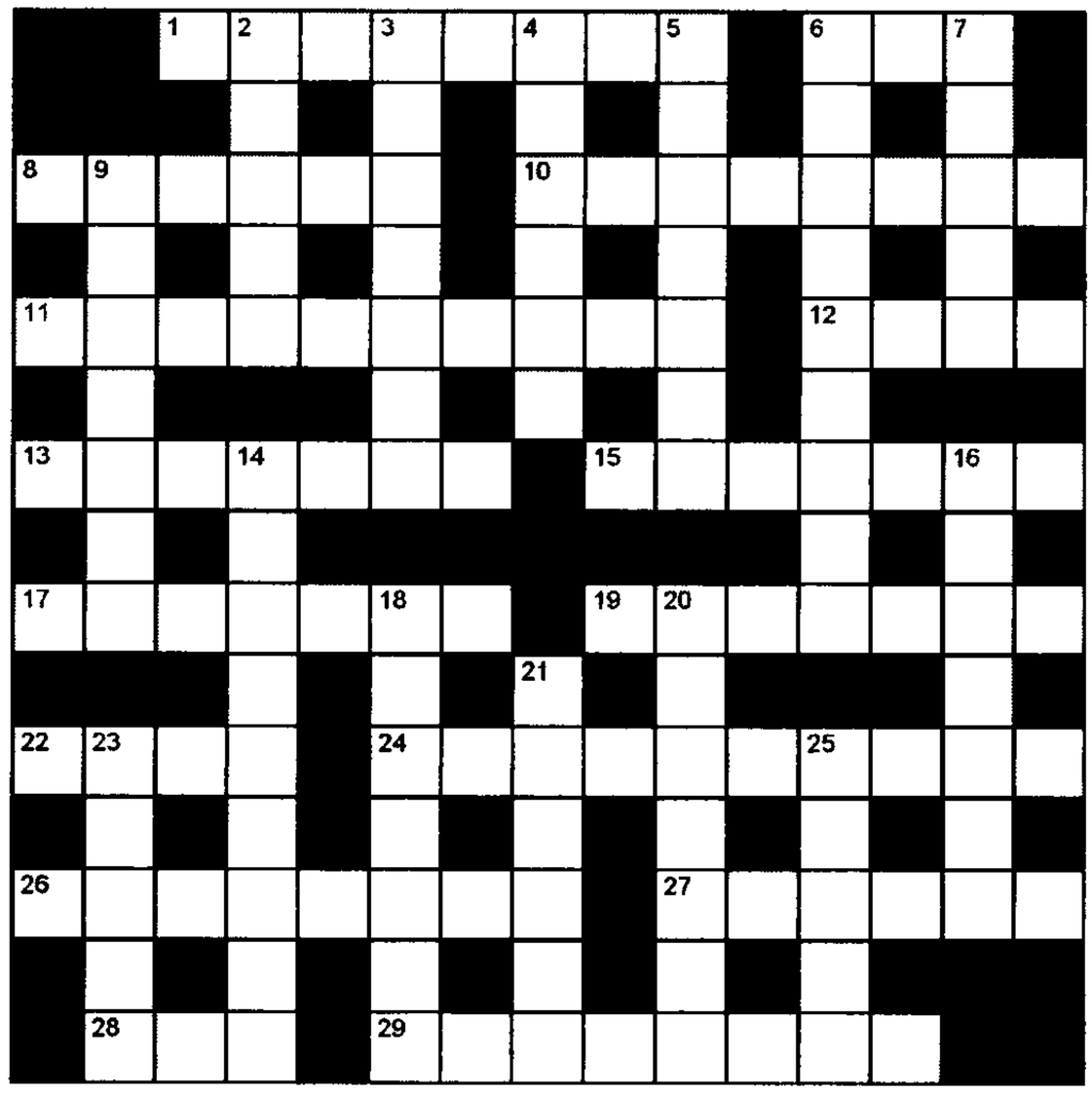
Abbey has been granted interested party status at the inquest which means it will be legally represented and may question witnesses. It is understood that corporate investigators Kroll Associates have also requested similar status. Chang jumped to his death after being questioned by two Kroll operatives about the letter. He left a note addressed to one of his interrogators admitting he was responsible and asking that his family be looked after.

Chang's family are likely to want to discover what happened during the interview which drove him to take his own life. He was due to start a new job and had no reason, they insist, to commit suicide. The tape of the interview could be crucial is assessing whether Abbey and/or Kroll are held in any way responsible for Chang's death due to the manner and nature of the questioning. Kroll's desire to be represented may indicate a concern that they could be blamed by their client Abbey who were not present during the interrogation of their employee.

*'Slicker'*

# EYE CROSSWORD 275

by Cyclops



**£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 3 December 2004.**

**Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk**

### ACROSS

1/6ac. Fresh novel produced after hitting bottom? (8,3)
8 See 22
10 Labour gaffer before public inquirer (8)
11 Member like Hain finally has nothing – all right to make a piss-taking gesture? (4,1,5)
12 Knockers of Britney "Useless" Spears' tacky tops (4)
13 Powerful people making considerable boobs commonly – lot of money invested (3,4)
15 Excited by Ben's, Tom puts away a stiff one (7)
17 Hislop's head butting Deayton and Paul's head goes in – personal problems (4-3)
19 Like an idiot, one wears an initially sexy number (7)
22/8 Where Bush is often giving ground to the Bureau? (4,6)
24 Lacking knowledge of the subject, like Natural Law Party members? (10)
26 Last man to have Saddam's head and bollocks (8)
27 The result of Margo's getting screwed? (6)
28/29 Am about to kiss ageing pop star Rod – sadly he'll get me in the papers (3,8)

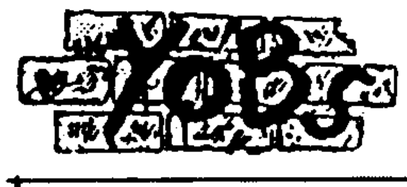
### DOWN

2 Objectionable type of member (5)
3 Mass murderer taking nine lives, four missing, unfortunately (7)
4 Doing it on the spur of the moment, cut short, Cyclops is put to the test getting end away (6)
5 'Burgher King', ignoring crappy grub, is a prized building (7)
6 Appropriate, Blair's rival being a Labour rebel (4,5)
7 "Bad boy Charley's with Camilla at last, attending the races" – *Sun* (5)
9 Tourists held up here – dial for re-routing (7)
14 TV shows Eye's singular protector taking on Bush (9)
16 People who "screw" bananas? (7)
18 Scorer Paul's heading pisspoor – no clue (7)
20 Exhibitionist's performance in bad taste (4-3)
21 Court favourite sees a bit of a shag as sinful (6)
23 Very little space as "penis extensions" go? (5)
25 Dumpster's changed political affiliation, flower (5)

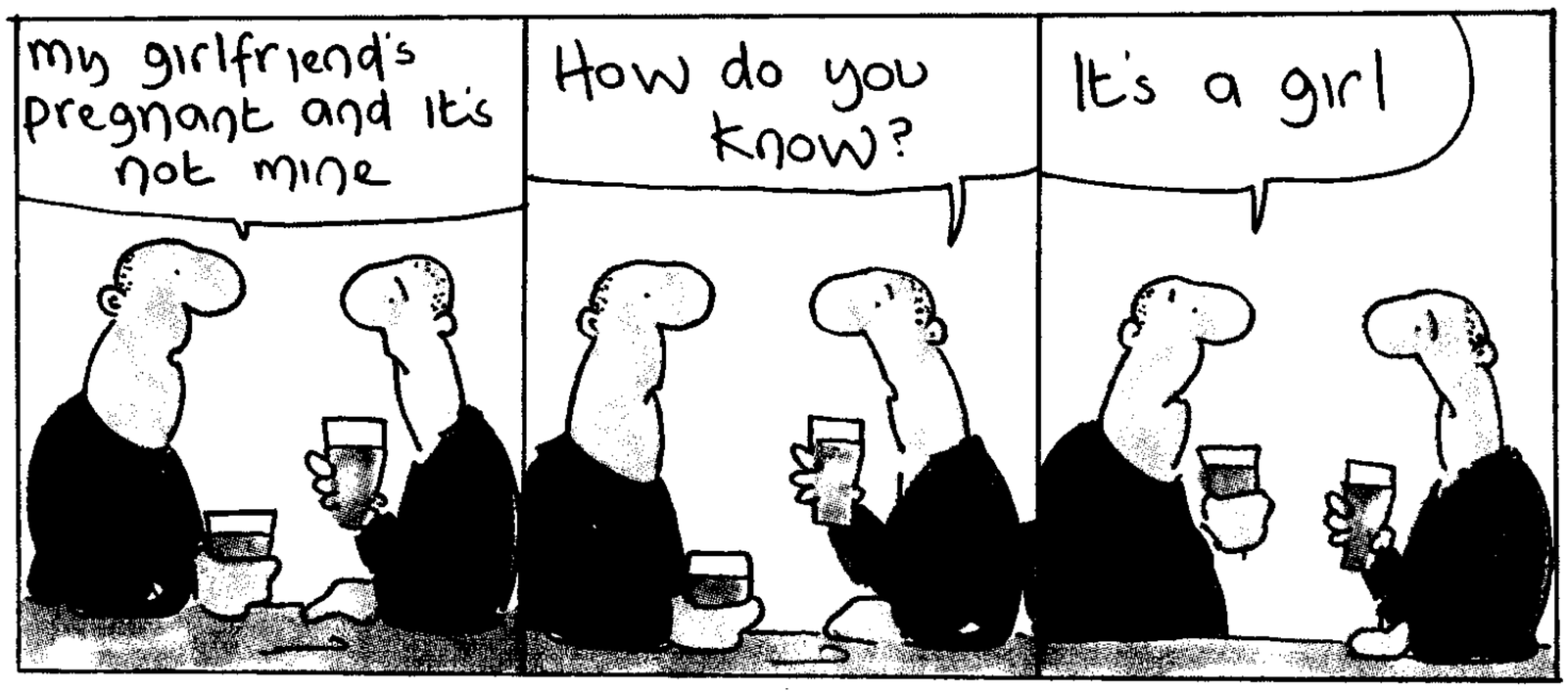
### Crossword 274 winner: PATRICIA GIBBS

ACROSS: 1/15 A kick up the Khyber 5 Gagging 9/21 Shit happens 10 Securities 12 Brazil nuts 13 Wasp 14 Benn 18 Islington 20 Whip 23 Stag 25 Whats up doc 26 Sweat it out 27 Exam 28 Bluster 29 Neasden.

DOWN: 2 Kohlrabis 3 Citizen 4 Unsold 6 Apres-ski 7 Get away 8 Needs 11 Couch potato 16 Espionage 17 Egg white 19 Ingrams 22 Tsetse 24 Towel.



HUSBAND



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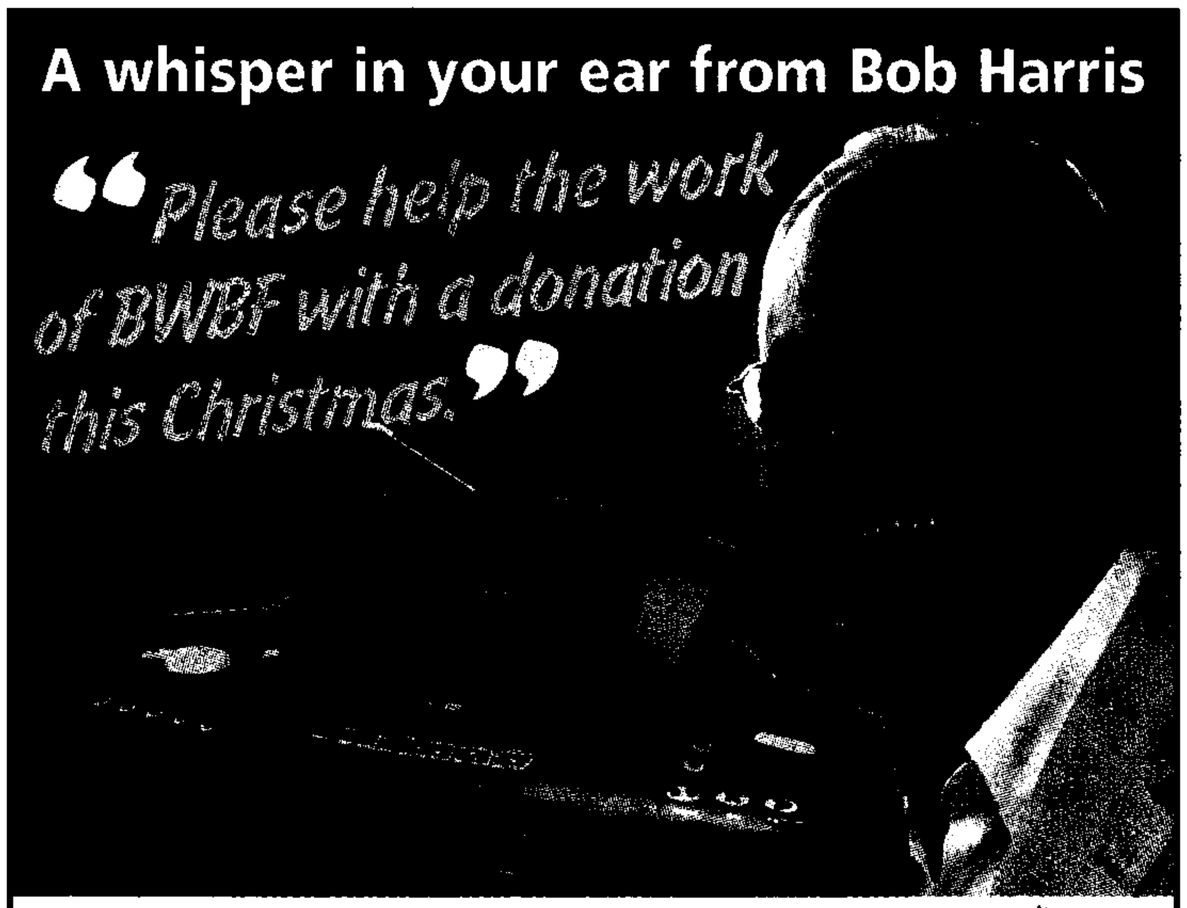


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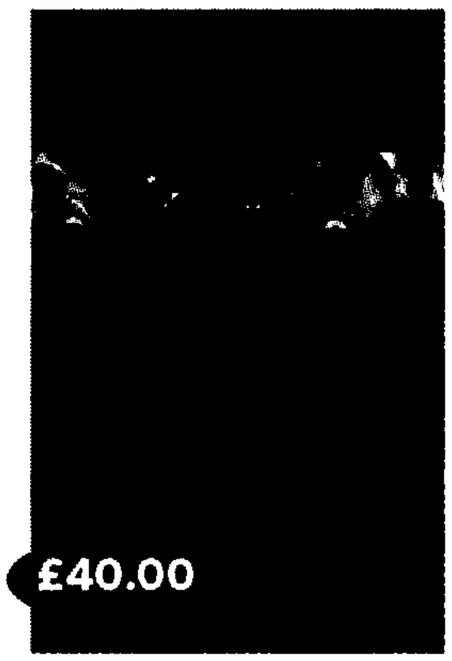


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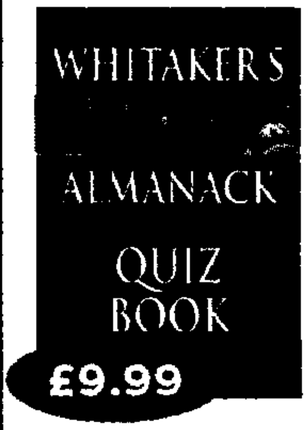


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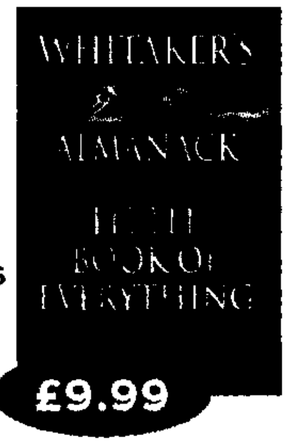


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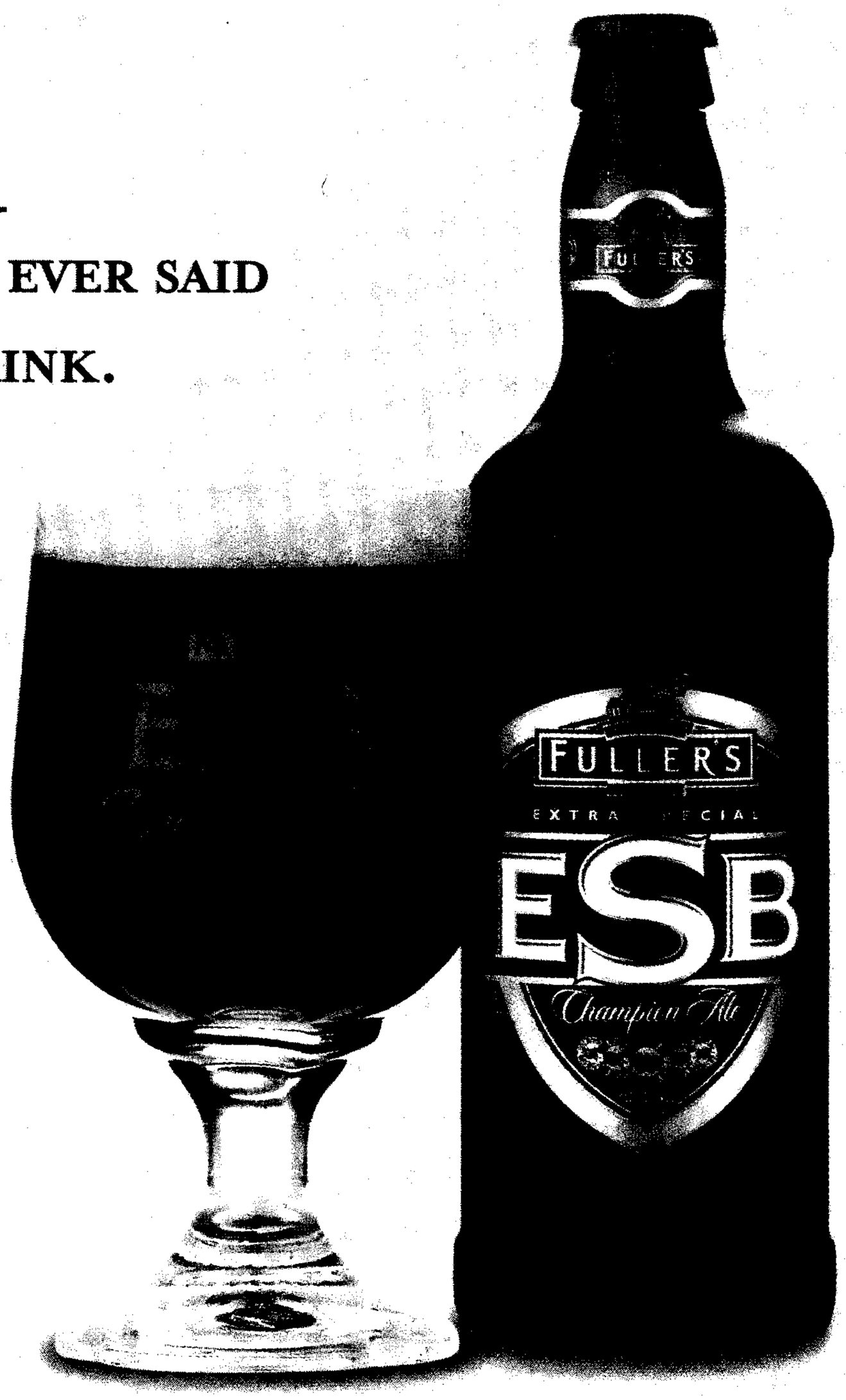


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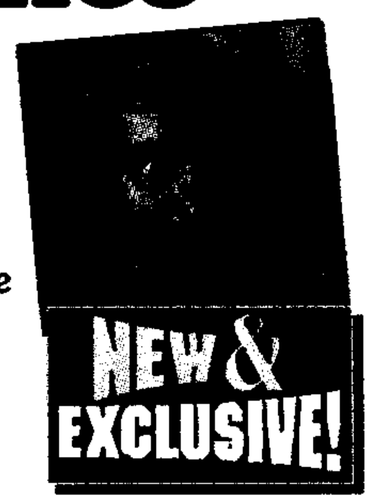


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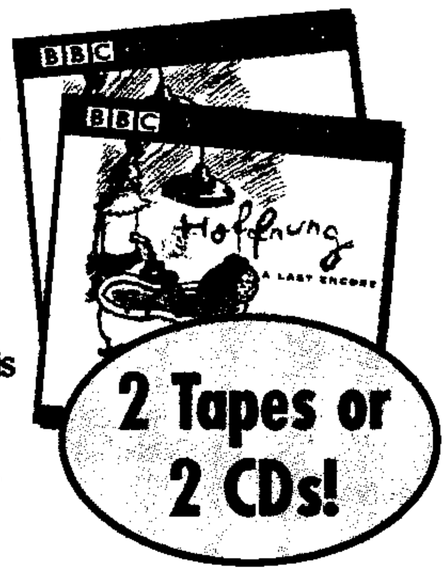


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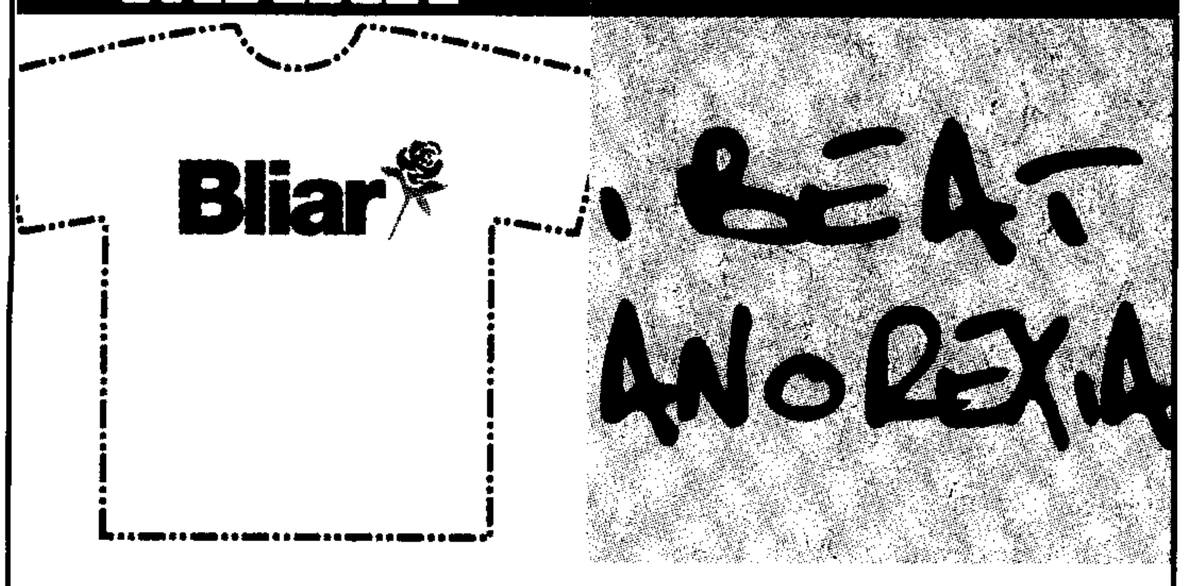


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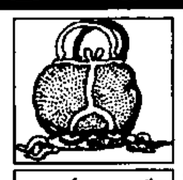

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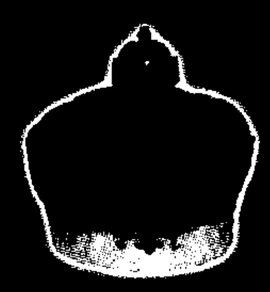

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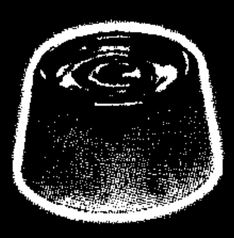

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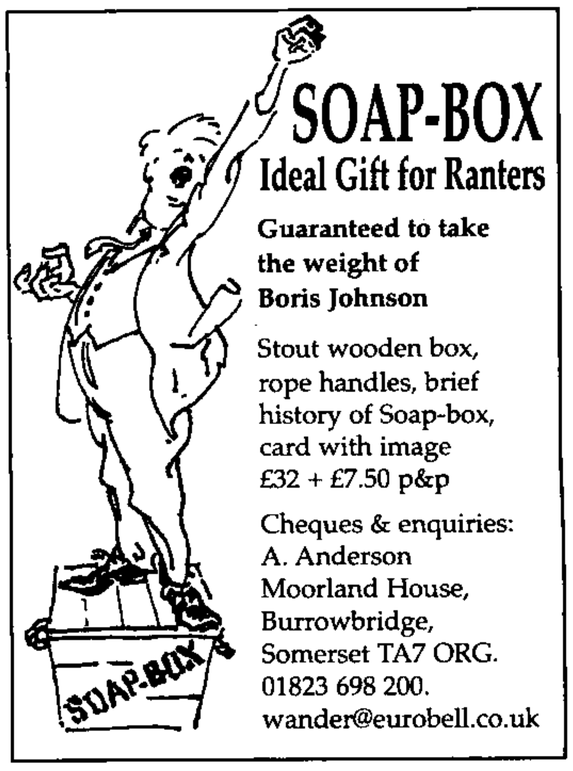


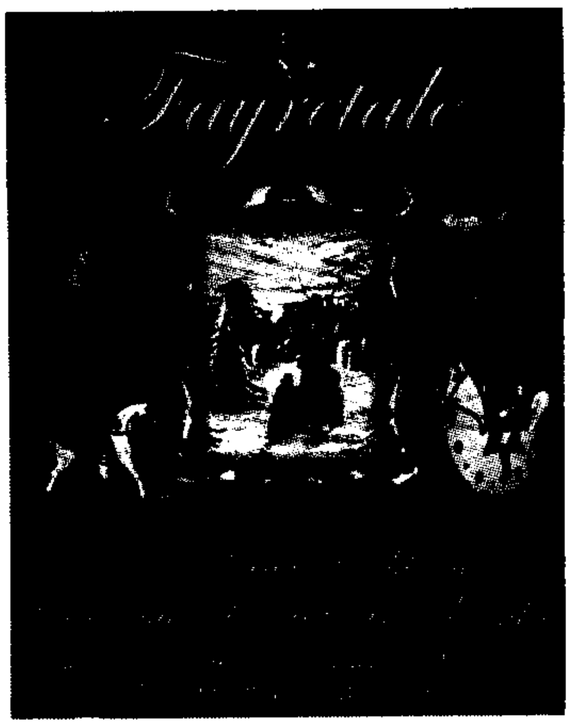

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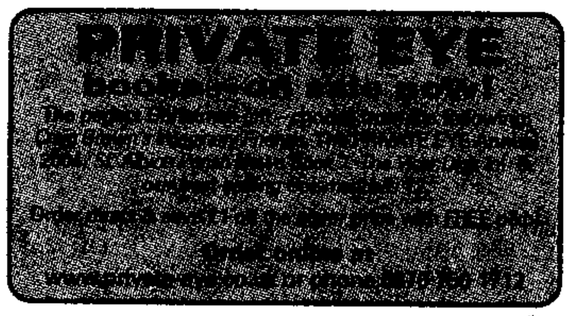


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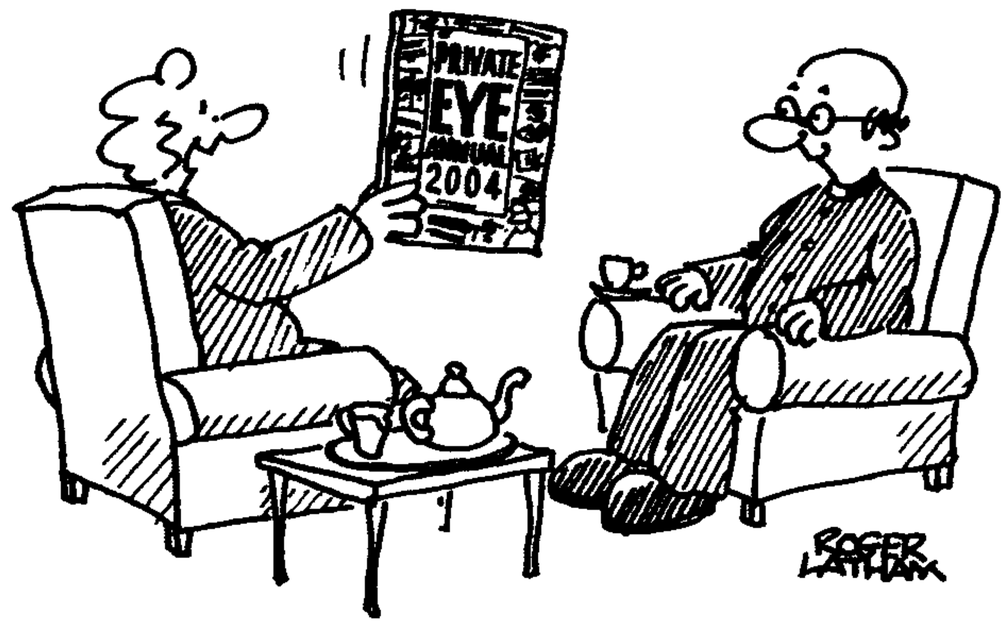


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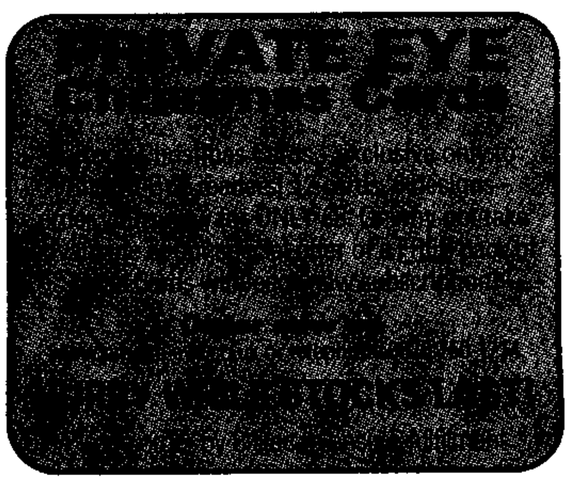


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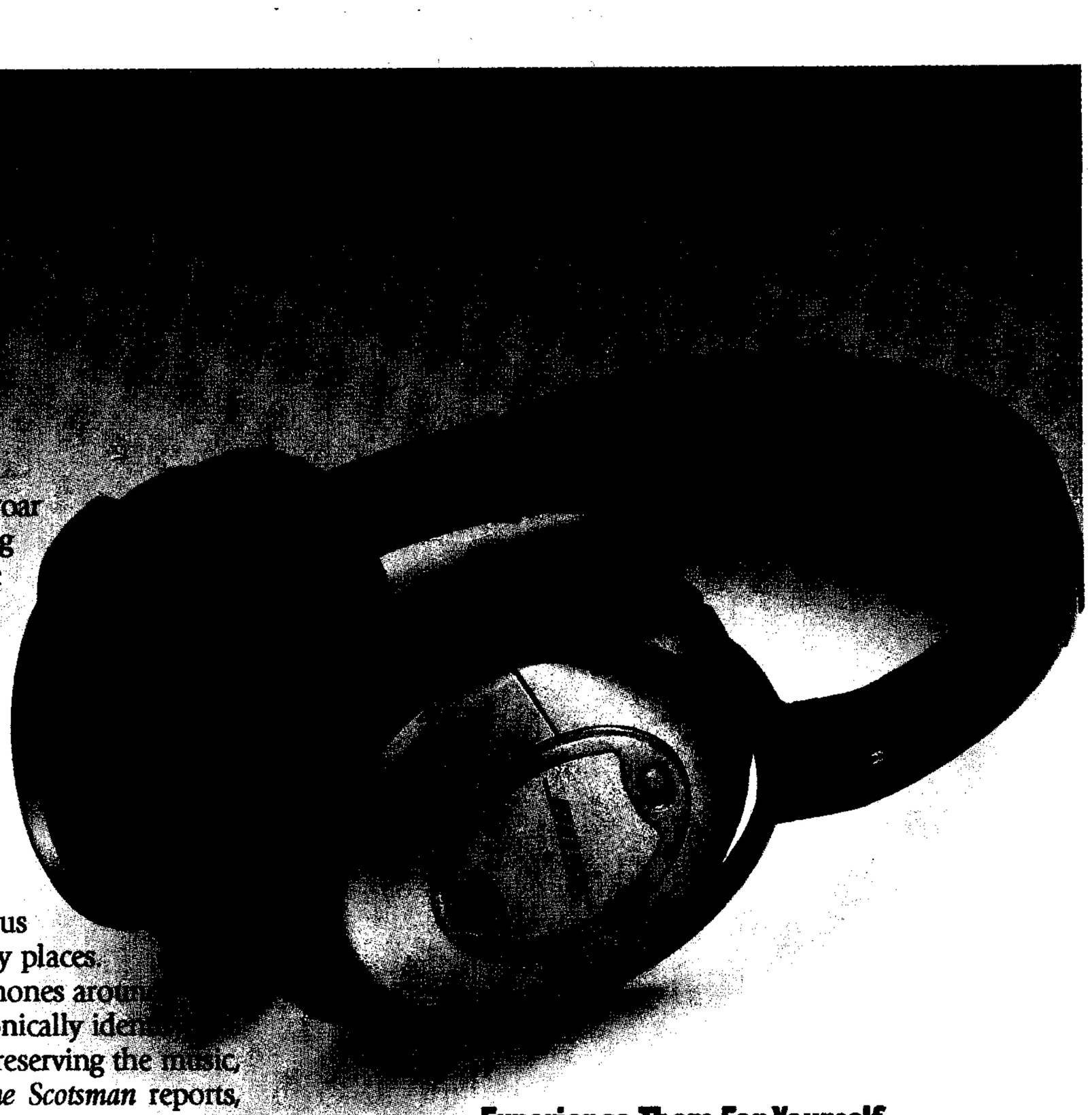
Brandleaders



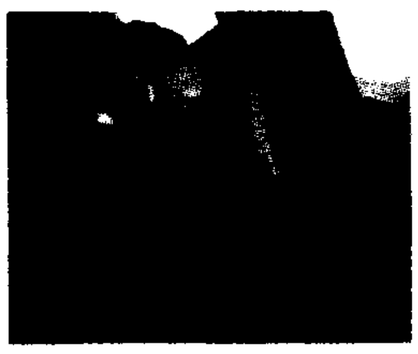
**Unwanted noise is everywhere. The engine roar inside an aeroplane cabin. The blaring sounds of city streets. The annoying din of the office. Our QuietComfort® 2 Acoustic Noise Cancelling headphones let you escape it all. Put them on and slip into a safe haven – where you can relax and enjoy peace and solitude or listen to your favourite music.**

## Proven Noise Reduction Technology.

Our original noise-reducing headphones were designed primarily for aeroplane travellers. But owners soon started telling us how much they enjoyed them in other noisy places. So we designed our QuietComfort® 2 headphones around the same U.S. patented technology to electronically identify and dramatically reduce noise, while faithfully preserving the music, movie dialogue or silence you want. As *The Scotsman* reports, when you switch on the noise reduction "what happens is remarkable... your world becomes a quieter, more lovely place."

## Our Best Sound Ever.

QuietComfort® 2 headphones deliver the best audio performance we have ever developed for headphones. Highs are impressively crisp and clean. Lows are deep and enveloping. Vocals are reproduced with lifelike authenticity. *Exclusive Homes* says that the "Audio quality is superb. As virtually all exterior noise is reduced, clarity of the music or speech you are listening to is massively enhanced." Whether you are looking for noise reduction or high-performance headphones for music, we think you'll agree – QuietComfort® 2 headphones simply make your music sound better.

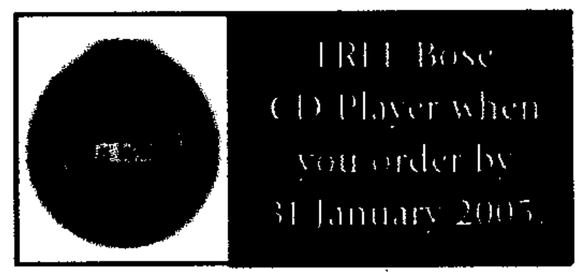


## Enhanced Comfort And Portability.

*Stuff* magazine gives these headphones five stars and calls them "the kings of silence." *TravelPlus* says they're "incredibly comfortable, too, creating a sense of personal space." To enjoy peace and quiet, simply turn them on. To add Bose-quality sound, attach the audio cable and connect them to a home stereo, laptop computer, portable CD/MP3 player or in-flight audio system. When you are done, our new fold-flat design allows you to quickly tuck your headphones away in a bag or briefcase, so you can take them almost anywhere.

## Experience Them For Yourself.

We don't expect you to take our word for how dramatically our new headphones reduce noise, how clean and full they sound or how comfortably they fit. So we invite you to try them risk-free for 30 days, satisfaction guaranteed. If you can live without them, return them for a full refund. It's that simple. Call now and ask about **free delivery**[1] and our convenient instalment plan which lets you make **4 equal payments over a period of up to 10 months with no interest charges from Bose.*** Pay either monthly or quarterly; the choice is yours. Learn more about our **FREE portable Bose CD Player** offer – worth £40. QuietComfort® 2 headphones – the new standard from Bose, one of the most respected names in sound.




# CALL 08000 85 85 72

**Quoting Reference 4112**

# ✉ Text 'Comfort 2' to 84118 for a FREE info pack.

For your FREE information pack and information on other products, call Bose or post this coupon to:
**Bose Ltd., Freepost EX 151, Exeter, EX1 1ZY**

Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss _____

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For information on all our products: www.bose.co.uk/4112

BOSE
Better sound through research

[1]UK deliveries only. Instalment payment plan is available on credit/debit cards only and subject to status. Initial payment for either the monthly or quarterly plan is due at time of order and all payments will be charged to your credit/debit card on the date the instalment is due. Monthly payments will be charged each month over a 4-month period. Quarterly payments must be completed within 10 months and after your initial payment, your credit/debit card will be charged every 3 months. There will be no interest charges from Bose. In the event of late payment, credit/debit card company interest charges may apply. Payment plan, free delivery and free CD Player offers not to be combined with any other offer or applied to previous purchases. Stocks limited. Offer available while stocks last. Price and/or payment plan subject to change without notice. Delivery subject to product availability. If product is returned, portable CD Player must be returned for a full refund. ©2004 Bose Corporation. All rights reserved. Quotes reprinted with permission from: Nick Blandon, *The Scotsman*, 6/9/03; *Exclusive Homes*, 10/03; *Stuff*, 1/04; *TravelPlus*, 11/03.

Bose has been voted Cool BrandLeaders 2004 and No. 1 cool technology brand.

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